CAN SCHWARZENEGGER BE DEFEATED?

The Nation.

PHONE SPIES
The Editors
Bruce Shapiro

THE FALSE BIRD FLU SCARE
Dr. Marc Siegel

JUAN RULFO'S DEAD SOULS
Carmen Boullosa

JUNE 5, 2006
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TARGET FORD

HOW A LEADING FOUNDATION ANGERED ITS CRITICS AND DISILLUSIONED ITS ADMIRERS

by SCOTT SHERMAN

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'MAKE THE PIE HIGHER'

Redmond, Wash.

■ Patricia J. Williams just gets better and better ["The Deciderator," May 15]. Perhaps because I've spent my life teaching English, I think her exquisite description of how Bush misunder-malappropriates our magnificent language is her best yet. LOIS HUDSON

TRANSLATOR: HAZARDOUS JOB

Kyoto, Japan

■ As a translator and scholar of Japanese who has had the experience of translating in "politicized" contexts, I was particularly struck by the disturbing case David Cole reported in "Lost in Translation" [May 15]. I will forward the article to other translators, and I imagine a number of us will write a letter in support of Mohammed Yousry. How can any effective communication occur across languages without translators? He should certainly be freed! REBECCA JENNISON

ENDANGERING THE TROOPS

Evanston, Ill.

■ I cannot thank Jeremy Scahill enough for "Blood Is Thicker Than Blackwater" [May 8]. I am a mother whose son is in the Army, stationed in Iraq. I was distressed by the tragic destruction of life in Falluja caused by the US retaliatory action for the deaths of the four men who are the subject of Scahill's story. I suspected that the four were contractors, and I resent the fact that mercenaries (for that is what those contractors are), not subject to military rules, can create circumstances that our military must pay for. I believe these mercenaries put the lives of US soldiers—as well as the lives of innocent Iraqis—at risk. Blackwater should be held responsible not just for the deaths of the four men but for all the lives lost in Falluja. The Bush Administration, which chose to privatize this war, is the true culprit.

MARGARETTA SWIGERT-GACHERU

MOSER, *AKA* 'THE EVISCERATOR'

Southport, Conn.

■ Bob Moser's coup de grâce on reborn-again renegade Ralph Reed ["The Devil Inside," April 17] would have made Walker Percy's day. In his matchless novel *The Moviegoer* Percy's alter ego, Binx Bolling, confesses: "Whenever I feel bad, I go to the library and read controversial periodicals." Then: "Down I plunk myself with a liberal weekly at one of the massive tables, nodding to myself whenever the writer scores a point. 'Damn right, old son,' I say, jerking my chair in approval. 'Pour it on.'" And finally the clincher: "'That one did it. Eviscerated.'" May Moser (to paraphrase the master) continue to eviscerate those deserving.

NOEL E. PARMENTEL JR.

THE RUG & THE MOUTH

Amherst, NH

■ Re Gene Seymour's review of Dave Kindred's *Sound and Fury* ["The Odd Couple," April 24], about Howard Cosell and Muhammad Ali: What was so transcendent and also frustrating about these two men is that they were so great at what they did, at who they were, that we all kept forgetting that they were making their millions off a "sport" that consisted of two men pounding each other's faces until one of them was brain-injured enough to fall to the mat for a count of ten. And yet if it were not for this gladiator bloodletting display in our living rooms, chances are nobody would have cared one bit about what either Cosell or Ali had to say about anything. And yet, we cared. Cassius Clay was a childhood hero of my generation; years later, Muhammad Ali became an adult model for so many of us. And Howard Cosell taught us that even the most trivial or mindless sport could be an arena for intelligent exchange and taking strong stands—and to hell with what the sponsors might think. BILL SIEGEL

SOCIALISM—BRING IT ON!

Ronald Aronson's "The Left Needs More Socialism" [April 17] drew heavy mail—positive, negative, from left and right, from many men and two women. Herewith a sampling. —THE EDITORS

Brusly, La.

■ AMEN! Put this article together with Katrina vanden Heuvel's call for mature, creative politics and one has evidence that the American left is stirring, even if it is still in critical condition.

BENJAMIN G. LANIER-NABORS

Hillsborough, NJ

■ Regarding Ronald Aronson's use of the term "socialism" in his title, my response is "It's about time." CHUCK AUGELLO

Lawrence, Kans.

■ Damn straight it's time to punt the liberal capitalist lite and talk turkey. Because of this article, I'm re-subscribing to *The Nation*. This is called "dissent," my friends, and not the liberal drivel of the corporate-owned Democratic Party, which keeps burning out the heart of the resistance to greed, corruption and environmental degradation. DOUG HARVEY

Schenectady, NY

■ According to Ronald Aronson, the left needs more socialism. If the left follows that advice, it will continue to be marginalized. Socialism has been entirely discredited because it leads to tyranny. The left should adhere to the liberal philosophy instead of adopting an authoritarian creed like socialism. Liberalism believes in constitutionally limited government and free markets. MICHAEL T. SEAMAN

Mahwah, NJ

■ Ronald Aronson acknowledges that liberalism offers no alternative to capitalism. Liberalism is mere reformism. *The Nation* itself is guilty of serving up the false promise of a sane, just and peaceful capitalism. But Aronson's final statement reveals what is deeply wrong with the left. He states that the American left can only present a true alternative to capitalism by "getting friendly again with socialism," whatever that means. He does not call for revolution. He does not call for a general strike. He does not urge readers to join a socialist party. The US left is spineless, afraid of what must really be done. MICHAEL D. JAMES

Escondido, Calif.

■ It is refreshing to read someone finally addressing the elephant in the living room. The pendulum may have begun to reach its rightward limit and if so, socialism needs to be included in the discourse. After the Soviet Union collapsed, a question posed somewhere on the Usenet asked, "Is socialism dead?" To which someone responded, "Don't be silly, socialism hasn't even been born yet." Ain't it about time?

BARRY LOGAN

Cupertino, Calif.

■ A truly remarkable performance. In a 2,000-word article about socialism, Ronald Aronson mentions Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, the World Social Forum, even the German Social Democrats, but avoids using the word "Cuba" even once. Apparently for Aronson there is such a thing as too much socialism. ELI STEPHENS

Arlington Heights, Ill.

■ The last time socialism swept the world, the proponents promised the same as Ronald Aronson does but then apparently got frustrated with the ignorant masses and created gulags, re-education centers and the like to force the masses into line for their own good. The masses lost the ability to express their opinions or participate in their governance. For all its faults, the capitalist system is still subservient to the masses. Yes, Enrons occur, but when they do, those responsible are tried, convicted and thrown in jail by the masses. ROGER KENNEY

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EDITORIALS

Phone Spies

The revelation that the National Security Agency has, since 2001, collected records of billions of phone calls made and received by Americans confirms the worst fears about the lawlessness of the Bush Administration. This President and his aides have displayed disdain for the rule of law and for the truth. Bush initially denied that the spying was taking place. Then when it was exposed, the Administration claimed that the spying was limited in scope. In light of what we now know, how can anyone trust the word of Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden—who as director of the NSA implemented Bush's spying program and who is now the President's nominee to direct the Central Intelligence Agency—when he claimed as recently as January that the domestic surveillance program was "highly targeted" and aimed only at "international communications"?

The Administration would seem to be violating the Fourth Amendment's protections against unreasonable government searches and seizures. There is also the matter of its disregard of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which requires the government to obtain a warrant for electronic surveillance. By any measure Congress has sufficient grounds not just to investigate but to aggressively challenge the Administration's actions. After ABC News reported that the FBI has acknowledged reviewing phone records of reporters for that network and other outlets as part of an effort to identify whistleblowers, Congress also has a responsibility to demand information about just how much spying is taking place.

So far, however, Congress is speaking loudly but carrying a small stick. Republican Senate Judiciary Committee chair Arlen Specter complains that "there has been no meaningful Congressional oversight on this program," but where are the subpoenas from his committee to the officials engaged in these activities? Specter says he wants to ask phone company executives about what records they turned over to the NSA and why. But the senator has to know that the fundamental questions can only be answered by an investigation of an Administration that cannot be allowed to plead executive privilege. Democrats also have to get over their timidity. Isn't it time, for instance, for its leaders to acknowledge that Democratic Senator Russ Feingold was right when he proposed in March that Bush be censured for ordering the NSA to eavesdrop on Americans' phone conversations without obtaining proper warrants?

The Democrats have a new chance to pressure the Republican leadership to act by supporting Representative Maurice Hinchey's push for the reopening of the Justice Department inquiry into who authorized the spying programs—an investigation that was ended May 9, on the eve of the latest revelations about the NSA, supposedly because needed security clearances had been denied. Hinchey wants to know: Who in the DOJ first authorized the domestic surveillance program? What was that official's justification for doing so? Had the Bush Administration already enacted the program before getting DOJ approval?

Equally vital are questions about what the NSA has done with information obtained from its review of all those billions of phone records: What are the standards for making the leap from data-mining to eavesdropping? How many times has that leap been made? With what agencies have data been shared? What, if anything, has been done with that information? These are questions that cannot be answered by telephone company executives, and perhaps not even by General Hayden. We need a get-to-the-bottom-of-it investigation.

Democrats must start the process by explaining to Americans that it is not merely possible to keep Americans safe and free—it is necessary. The message must be that obeying the rule of law is not an obstacle to national security but an asset. Only by playing by the rules will the government be viewed at home and abroad as acting legitimately. And it is now all too clear that the Bush Administration has not been doing so.

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COMMENT

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The Wiretapping Tango

As more facts emerge in the NSA's warrantless call-tracking scandal, it's clear that this isn't about government abuses alone: It's also a delicate tango between security agencies and telecommunications executives. The government may lead, but its essential partners are the phone companies that own the switches, computers and call-routing software.

To me and other residents of at least one American city, this is a familiar dance. Beginning in 1964 New Haven police persuaded executives of the Southern New England Telephone Company (today part of AT&T) to let officers monitor traffic on the phone company's mainframe. "Ordinary citizens" supposedly had nothing to fear: At first the warrantless taps were aimed at illegal gambling. But as the 1960s drew on and New Haven was roiled by protest, this limited collaboration between law enforcement and the private sectors turned into a massive twenty-four-hour-a-day operation—in its way a primitive, small-city form of data-mining. If someone on the NHPD wiretap list received or made a call, the party on the other end was identified from SNET's records and added to the list. Soon it grew by the hundreds. When the program was shut down in 1971, the list included Black Panthers, law professors, feminists, a movie theater and a dry cleaner, with details of their calls hand-noted on 3-by-5 cards. As with the NSA it was only infighting and a leak to a journalist that exposed the wiretap program and led to a lawsuit against the city and SNET.

By the mid-1970s illegal phone company cooperation with surveillance had become a scandal nationwide. Though no city's taps topped New Haven's, in cities like New York and Chicago, local police red squads routinely relied on friendly telecommunications executives for access to records. Under J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI did the same. In 1975 the Senate committee investigating government surveillance activities, headed by Frank Church, revealed that phone companies had for years allowed warrantless surveillance by the National Security Agency under the code name Operation Shamrock: computerized monitoring of all telegraphic data into and out of the United States. As Jason Vest of the Project on Government Oversight notes on POGO's blog, in 1976 Representative Bella Abzug did exactly what Senator Arlen Specter is threatening to do today—she subpoenaed top officials of Western Union, ITT and RCA Global.

Indeed, today's NSA scandal and the Administration's response to the revelations track directly back to that era. When Abzug issued her subpoenas, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld—President Ford's Chief of Staff and Defense Secretary, respectively—persuaded the Justice Department to assert unprecedented claims of executive privilege not only over FBI and NSA testimony but also over that of Western Union and RCA. The companies, perhaps fearful of contempt citations from a Democratic Congress, refused to comply and provided Abzug with her documents.

In retrospect it's clear that the Bush Administration has systematically sought a return to the days of phone company collaboration in warrantless surveillance. One key provision of the Patriot Act of 2001 allows modification of court-enforced

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consent decrees in cities like Chicago that blocked phone company cooperation with warrantless surveillance requests. In 2003 the White House went further, with Patriot Act II: Section 313, which passed the House but failed in the Senate and would have eliminated any civil liability for telecommunications companies cooperating with federal surveillance requests.

With the NSA scandal, the Administration smells opportunity. If Specter subpoenas telecom CEOs, look for this White House to reassert the executive privilege claims that failed in 1975—and this time, without fear of an opposition Congress, those CEOs may feel inclined to cooperate, establishing a new and dangerous zone of presidential power.

Will the phone companies become permanent auxiliary partners in illegal spying and pawns of an Administration bent on ever-expanding executive power? As Congress and the telecom companies decide how to respond to the burgeoning scandal, they should learn one thing from the New Haven case: The cost of corporate cooperation in illegal surveillance is ultimately huge. In New Haven taxpayers in a cash-strapped city paid 1,200 victims $1.75 million, while the officials who ordered the operation remained immune. That's not just vast legal costs borne by the city and SNET. With a much-deserved lawsuit already filed in the NSA case, it is taxpayers, consumers and shareholders—not George W. Bush or telecom CEOs—who will eventually pay the bill.

But the cost is more than financial. The habit of casual illegal activity poisoned several successive New Haven administrations and damaged the reputations of phone company executives. The program, started as a law-enforcement expedient, fed a larger pattern of police and FBI spying, which, as the Church committee noted about New Haven, produced enormous volumes of dross "intelligence" without preventing crime. The question is not data-mining but whether the Senate Judiciary Committee—and perhaps the court system—will have the political will and legal fortitude to stand up for the rule of law, or whether the clock will be turned back and it will be as if the reforms of the 1970s had never happened.

BRUCE SHAPIRO

Bruce Shapiro is editor of Shaking the Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism in America *(Nation Books).*

The False Bird Flu Scare

In 2003 concerns about the SARS coronavirus prompted the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to work with the World Health Organization to encourage reporting and isolation of cases and contacts while at the same time cordoning off parts of Asia and Toronto. Health officials spoke publicly of a new era of cooperation. But the media-saturated advisories and pronouncements resulted in the loss of billions of tourist dollars to the Asian and Canadian economies. Ultimately, SARS infected about 8,400 people worldwide. There was never any objective evidence that regional quarantine helped squelch the virus, and follow-up studies found SARS to be not nearly as infectious as had been originally thought. Yet public health officials continued to speak of that global action as an unqualified success.

The same pattern of CDC/WHO involvement has been followed in the US-fueled worldwide overreaction to H5N1 avian influenza. This bird flu cannot routinely affect humans in its current form (114 deaths to date in nine years). But the priority being placed on it as a potential threat to humans is obscuring diseases that are already worldwide killers: malaria, which kills more than 1 million people a year; tuberculosis, more than 2 million; and HIV/AIDS, more than 3 million. As the worldwide health network grows, promoted by US healthcare officials but involving public health agencies all over the world, I am concerned that there will be a simultaneous export of the American obsession with certain diseases while others are excluded.

Worldwide spending on AIDS was $8.3 billion in 2005, with almost half of this coming from George W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. But a 2005 WHO/UNAIDS report estimates that AIDS treatment coverage is $18 billion below global needs for 2005–07, with a projected $22 billion annual requirement by 2008. The WHO has not come close to its goal of treating 3 million AIDS patients by the end of 2005. Currently just over a million are receiving antiretroviral therapy.

Meanwhile, here in the United States, Bush has proposed cutting $15 million in AIDS research at the National Institutes of Health, while increasing funds for studying avian flu and bioterrorism. Bush's proposed 2007 budget calls for increasing by 0.3 percent funding for the NIH's Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The money will be targeted for avian flu and biodefense. Bush is also calling for a 6.2 percent increase for other NIH biodefense projects, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science's analysis of the President's budget. This is in addition to the $5.6 billion already being largely wasted on Project Bioshield, which is supposed to help provide medical countermeasures against a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack, with much more to come in Bioshield II. Almost $1 billion has gone to the manufacture of 75 million doses of anthrax vaccine, for example, despite the fact that anthrax is not contagious and has not recurred since the twenty-two cases in 2001 thought to be linked to terror.

Some public health officials have argued that avian flu should be at least as high a priority as AIDS because of the theoretical worst case, in which it could cause a severe human pandemic, but it is not even clear that the money allocated for bird flu will be used effectively for real prevention. Ron De Haven of the Animal and Plant Inspection Service of the Department of Agriculture says that although H5N1 is still a major threat to birds, only $4.4 million of his department's $1.1 billion budget for 2005–06 was earmarked for biosecurity outreach, to keep infected birds from coming here. And though $3.6 billion has already been approved for emergency pandemic preparedness against bird flu, with an additional $2.6 billion proposed, Dr. Andrea Gambotto, the creator of a new bird flu vaccine using modern genetic techniques (adenovirus) that has been effective in mice and birds, has been unable to get NIH funding to test this vaccine in humans. Newer approaches could lead to more potent vaccines with a quicker turnaround time—a much more effective tool for reacting to a pandemic as it is happening than

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COMMENT

current attempts to anticipate one that may never happen. But the President's new budget cuts 4.5 percent from the CDC's core programs while adding no funds for NIH. There is clearly no priority for key research programs. It is true that as part of his "worst case" pandemic flu preparedness plan announced in May, Bush awarded $1 billion in contracts to vaccine manufacturers to upgrade flu vaccine technology over the next five years. Of course, there is no guarantee that this goal will actually be met or that the money will reach the right hands.

Overseas, the biggest health problems that could benefit from our attention are malnutrition and the lack of clean water and proper sewage. Diseases like schistosomiasis and malaria thrive because of poor public health conditions. But our outreach does not emphasize them. Our public health system appears to be much more concerned about a disease like bird flu transforming into something that could threaten us than it does in helping the world with diseases that already threaten poor people everywhere. More than 16 million people die every year of malnutrition. Eight hundred million people worldwide currently suffer from hunger and malnutrition. How many people who survive mainly on poultry will have this food taken from them if worldwide health authorities—their perceived need to act in a hurry fueled by media reports—continue to kill domestic fowl indiscriminately whenever H5N1 appears?

A TV movie that aired in May, *Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America*, capitalizes on fear by depicting a crippling loss of basic services and mass graves. This movie wasn't made in a vacuum—many scientists and journalists have been doomsaying on bird flu to such an extent that they have created a fear terrain even Disney could exploit. Sadly, hyperbole is not a method of discourse exclusive to TV drama; a public health blog for bird flu fanatics recently suggested the United States should pull out of Iraq and use the resources we save for bird flu preparation. On the surface this sounds like a terrific idea. On further reflection, it seems clear that going into Iraq in the first place was based on the same kind of argument—in which a remote but scary risk is exaggerated so it appears to be looming—that has characterized the public health reaction to bird flu. MARC SIEGEL, MD

Marc Siegel, MD, an associate professor of medicine at New York University's School of Medicine, is the author of Bird Flu: Everything You Need to Know About the Next Pandemic *(Wiley).*

CALVIN TRILLIN

REASSURANCE ON THE FACT THAT THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HAS A RECORD OF EVERY PHONE CALL YOU HAVE MADE SINCE 2001

The thought that they would ever troll or snoop
Into our private lives, Bush says, is silly.
These folks—the ones who spoke of mushroom
clouds—
Are telling us that we should trust them. Really.

The Insecurity State

Recently a friend confided to me, "I can no longer check my air baggage at the curbside. I cannot use the automatic e-ticket machine. I have to stand in line to get my seat assignment. Apparently my name is now on some kind of security list. All they would tell me was, 'Because your birthday is July 4.' I do not feel that this is anymore my country, the one I grew up to love."

Neither he nor I have access to the mysteries of national security that would explain why a birthday can be a clue to the identity of a terrorist. But his new feeling about his country is duplicated in millions of others of us. Not long ago I was asked to write a foreword to a book by a German colleague who is very critical of the current foreign policies of the US government, including the role that religion seems to play in those policies. Over my lifetime I have written thousands of published pages. But in writing that short piece, for the first time I asked myself, "Will my stated agreement with most of this book bring me to the attention of government? Will the publication of this book endanger the tax exemptions of this Midwestern press?"

Pick up the phone these days, discover that the call is from Germany or South Africa, and the thought occurs, "Who is listening to this call, what NSA computer is programmed to pick up certain words in this international conversation?"

Strong civic habit in most Americans protests against these thoughts and feelings. I do not want to believe that my own government is the enemy of my freedom. Yet the feelings keep coming. In my training for the personal counseling side of the Protestant ministry, they taught me, Never argue with another person's feelings. Tell someone, "You shouldn't feel that way," and the blunt response is likely to be, "But I do!"

American citizens are now caught in a security paradox: We feel insecure and expect the government to protect us, but its responses make us feel newly insecure. To acknowledge, understand and grapple with these conflicted feelings is a new challenge for most of us. We know what paranoia is. With the rational side of our brains we tell the other side: Not everyone in the world is out to destroy us. Not everyone in government is unworthy of our trust. Start distrusting everything a government says or does, and you live in a downward spiral that can lead to real madness. Hold on, citizen, things could be a lot worse.

Indeed they can. One horrible example is the latter years of the German Democratic Republic. Its Stasi—secret police—recruited up to half the population to spy on the other half. When

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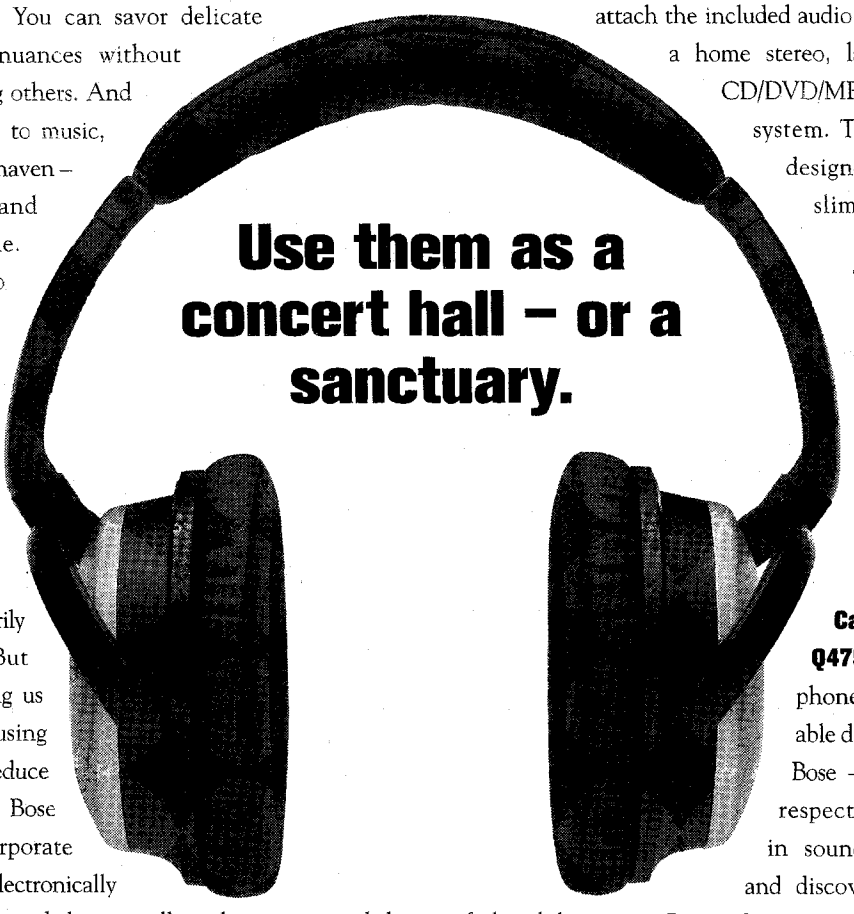
The Bose® QuietComfort® 2 Acoustic Noise Cancelling® Headphones.

Think of them as a reprieve from the world around you. Whether it's the engine roar inside an airplane cabin, the bustle of the city or the distractions in the office, Bose QuietComfort® 2 headphones help them fade softly into the background with the flick of a switch. You can savor delicate musical nuances without disturbing others. And when you're not listening to music, you can slip into a tranquil haven – where you can relax and enjoy peace and solitude. Clearly, these are no ordinary headphones. It's no exaggeration to say they're one of those things you have to experience to believe.



Use them as a concert hall – or a sanctuary.

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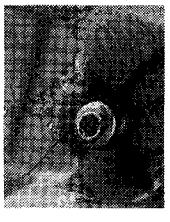

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COMMENT

the GDR collapsed, the drawers of Stasi files, placed end to end, would have extended about 120 miles. The files are now preserved in a Berlin archive and are accessible to any German who wants to look up his or her record from the 1949–90 era. Said one staff member of the archive in 1999, "The dissolution of trust among East Germans got so bad that no wife or husband, no parent or child, could trust that anything said in a conversation would not get reported. We no longer could talk to each other."

Something in me—and many other Americans—wants to protest any such comparison. Surely, we say to ourselves, our society is not close to being that oppressive. Surely, whatever our political preferences, our government is not close to being that bad. Surely, surely... but the question keeps creeping in, Who knows? Why a July 4 birthday? Recently, a highly educated woman remarked, "These days I usually watch what I say. I never know who might be listening." It is truly a new American experience. We who have luxuriated in laws protecting free speech are wondering if those laws really hold anymore.

Liberal individualism to the contrary, it would seem that freedom even to think freely needs the support of conversation with others. Without it, internal personal freedom may just shrink. After all, real totalitarianism aims at thought control. It clamps down on subversive communication.

Compared with many other peoples, modern Americans have little experience of real state terror. Perhaps it is typically American for us to worry about minor inconveniences at airports as well as small signs of overweening presidential power. Edmund Burke brought that American characteristic to the attention of the British Parliament in 1775, as he urged his colleagues to pay attention to the peculiar political spirit of the colonists. Americans, he warned, "augur misgovernment at a distance, and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze."

Just so. Better to worry about the breeze before it becomes a hurricane. DONALD W. SHRIVER JR.

Donald W. Shriver Jr., president emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, is the author of the recently published Honest Patriots: Loving a Country Enough to Remember Its Misdeeds.

In the Black(water)

Tens of thousands of Hurricane Katrina victims remain without homes. The environment is devastated. People are disenfranchised. Financial resources, desperate residents are told, are scarce. But at least New Orleans has a Wal-Mart parking lot serving as a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center with perhaps the tightest security of any parking lot in the world. That's thanks to the more than $30 million Washington has shelled out to the Blackwater USA security firm since its men deployed after Katrina hit. Under contract with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service, Blackwater's men are ostensibly protecting federal reconstruction projects for FEMA. Documents show that the government paid Blackwater $950 a day for each of its guards in the area. Interviewed by *The Nation* last September, several of the company's guards stationed in New Orleans said they were being paid $350 a day. That would have left Blackwater with $600 per man, per day to cover lodging, ammo, other overhead—and profits.

Shortly after the hurricane hit, Blackwater "launched a helicopter and crew with no contract, no one paying us, that went down to New Orleans," says company vice chairman Cofer Black. "We saved some 150 people that otherwise wouldn't have been saved. And, as a result of that, we've had a very positive experience." Indeed. It was only days after the company arrived that it started reeling in lucrative deals.

According to Blackwater's government contracts, obtained by *The Nation*, from September 8 to September 30, 2005, Blackwater was paid $409,000 for providing fourteen guards and four vehicles to "protect the temporary morgue in Baton Rouge, LA." That contract kicked off a hurricane boon for Blackwater. From September to the end of December 2005, the government paid Blackwater at least $33.3 million—well surpassing the amount of Blackwater's contract to guard Ambassador Paul Bremer when he was head of the US occupation of Iraq. And the company has likely raked in much more in the hurricane zone. Exactly how much is unclear, as attempts to get information on Blackwater's current contracts in New Orleans have been unsuccessful.

"We saw the costs, in terms of accountability and dollars, for this practice in Iraq, and now we are seeing it in New Orleans," says Illinois Democrat Jan Schakowsky, who has been one of Blackwater's few critics in Congress. "They have again given a sweetheart contract—without an open bidding process—to a company with close ties to the Administration."

After *The Nation* exposed Blackwater's operations in New Orleans this past fall [see "Blackwater Down," October 10, 2005], Schakowsky and a handful of other Congress members raised questions about the scandal. They entered the report into the Congressional Record during hearings on Katrina and cited it in letters to DHS Inspector General Richard Skinner, who then began an inquiry. In letters to Congressional offices in February, Skinner defended the Blackwater deal, asserting that it was "appropriate" for the government to contract with the company. Skinner admitted that "the ongoing cost of the contract...is clearly very high" and then quietly dropped a bombshell: "It is expected that FEMA will require guard services on a relatively long-term basis (two to five years)." Two to five years? Already most of the 330 federally contracted private guards in the hurricane zone are working for Blackwater, according to the *Washington Post*. Another firm, DynCorp, is also trying to grab more of the action, offering its security services for less than $700 per day per guard.

The hurricane's aftermath has ushered in the homecoming of the "war on terror," a contract bonanza whereby companies can reap massive Iraq-like profits without leaving the country and at a minuscule fraction of the risk. To critics of the government's handling of the hurricane, the message is clear.

"That's what happens when the victims are black folks vilified before and after the storm—instead of aid, they get contained," says Chris Kromm, executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies and an editor of *Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch*. "If officials really cared about protecting the people of New Orleans, they wouldn't be giving millions to scandal-ridden con-

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tractors. They would have given the city money to rebuild their levees to withstand more than a Category 2 Hurricane. They still haven't done that—and hurricane season is upon us."

Kromm alleges that vital projects that have "gotten zero or little money" in New Orleans include: job creation, hospital and school reconstruction, affordable housing and wetlands restoration. Even in this context, DHS continues to defend the Blackwater contract. In a March 1 memo to FEMA, Matt Jadacki, the DHS Special Inspector General for Gulf Coast Hurricane Recovery, wrote that the Federal Protective Service considered Blackwater "the best value to the government."

While companies like Halliburton may have raked in more profits since George W. Bush took office, few have seen growth as dramatic as Blackwater's. The firm has been at the front of the line at the domestic and international taxpayer-funded feeding troughs and has recently hired some high-profile former government officials, like Cofer Black, former chief of CIA counterterrorism, and former Pentagon Inspector General Joseph Schmitz. In March Black represented Blackwater at a conference in Jordan, announcing that the company was seeking to broaden its role in even more conflict zones. Blackwater is rapidly expanding its operations, creating a new surveillance-blimp division, launching new training facilities in California and the Philippines, and increasingly setting its sights on the lucrative world of DHS contracts. It is clamoring to get into Darfur and has also hired Chilean troops trained under the brutal rule of Augusto Pinochet. "We scour the ends of the earth to find professionals," company president Gary Jackson told the *Guardian*. "The Chilean commandos are very, very professional, and they fit within the Blackwater system." The business magazine *Fast Company* recently named Jackson one of its "Fast 50," predicting that the company and its president are in for "a very strong (and long) decade."

It's hard to imagine that the cronyism that has marked the Bush Administration is not at play in Blackwater's success. Blackwater founder Erik Prince shares Bush's fundamentalist Christian views. He comes from a powerful Michigan Republican family and social circle, and his father, Edgar, helped Gary Bauer start the Family Research Council. According to a report prepared for *The Nation* by the Center for Responsive Politics, in all of Erik Prince's political funding generosity since 1989, he has never given a penny to a Democrat running for national office. Company president Jackson has also given money to Republican candidates. For his part, Joseph Schmitz—the former Pentagon Inspector General turned general counsel to Blackwater's parent, The Prince Group—lists on his résumé membership in the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a Christian militia formed before the First Crusade. Like Prince, he comes from a right-wing family; his father, former Congressman John Schmitz, was an ultraconservative John Birch Society director who later ran for President. Joseph Schmitz was once in charge of investigating private contractors like Blackwater, but he resigned amid allegations of stonewalling investigations conducted by his department. He now represents one of the most successful of those contractors.

Schakowsky charges that the Administration has written Blackwater "blank checks," saying that the internal DHS review of the company "leaves us with more questions than answers." She points out that the report fails to address the major issues stemming from deploying private forces on US streets. In her testimony this past September, Schakowsky said, "Ask any American if they want thugs from a private, for-profit company with no official law-enforcement training roaming the streets of their neighborhoods. The answer will be a resounding NO."

Blackwater's ascent comes in the midst of a major rebranding campaign aimed at shaking its mercenary image. The company is at the forefront of the trade association of mercenary firms, the International Peace Operations Association, which lobbies for even greater privatization of military operations. Blackwater and its cause have clearly found serious backing in the Bush Administration. Hiring Blackwater, says Schakowsky, "may be legal, but it is not a good deal for taxpayers and Gulf region residents in particular." Blackwater's sweetheart deals, both domestic and international, are representative of how business has been done under Bush. They are a troubling indicator of a trend toward less accountability and transparency and greater privatization of critical government functions. It's time that more members of Congress ask tough questions about Blackwater and its rapid, profitable rise.

JEREMY SCAHILL

Jeremy Scahill, a correspondent for Democracy Now!, *is a Puffin Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute.*

In Fact . . .

ENEMY OF THE STATE

■ In late April, Ramin Jahanbegloo, a progressive philosopher in Tehran, was arrested by the Iranian police; he is believed to be in the Evin Prison, a notorious torture center. No official charges have been filed, but Jahanbegloo has been denounced as an American agent by newspapers close to the regime, and on May 6 Iran's intelligence minister suggested that he is being held for "having contacts with foreigners." These accusations would be laughable were they not so grave. For the "foreigners" with whom this "American agent" has been in dialogue include such well-known partisans of the Bush Administration as Jürgen Habermas, Antonio Negri, Richard Rorty and Noam Chomsky. The author of books on Hegel, Isaiah Berlin and Gandhi, Jahanbegloo is a leading member of a circle of Iranian intellectuals who have placed human rights and nonviolence at the center of their concerns. The effort to silence him—and to stifle the free exchange of ideas between Iranian intellectuals and their peers abroad—is a disturbing sign of the hardening of the regime in Tehran, a development that our own hard-liners in Washington have only encouraged with their threats of a war on Iran (for more information, see: http://raminj.iranianstudies.ca).

ON THE WEB

■ Tom Hayden explores implications for the peace movement of a plan by centrist Democrats to pull out of Iraq; Dave Zirin and John Cox look at efforts at the World Cup to play nuclear politics with Iran (www.thenation.com).

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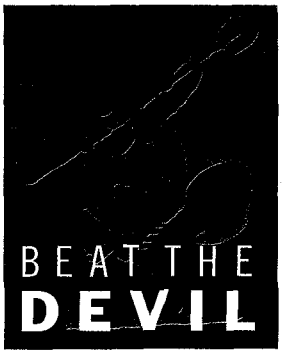
ALEXANDER COCKBURN

The Red Flag, From Berlin to West Bengal



Berlin: Is there a more vivid panorama of the downward arc of the Communist movement than the view from the foundations where once stood the Nazi SS headquarters at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8? Before one's eyes are photographs of men like the German Communist leader Ernst Thälmann. He was arrested in March 1933, right after Hitler came to power, taken to Albrecht-Strasse 8 and tortured. Never formally tried, he was murdered in Buchenwald on August 18, 1944.

Looking at the big photo of Thälmann—one of scores of German Communists and Socialists posted along that block—one can honor courage but also recall epic failures: the blunders of the Third Period, the defeat of the Popular Front in Spain, where a unit of the International Brigades was named for Thälmann. Raise your eyes from the line of photos and glance north and there is a stretch of the Berlin wall, which once ran a bit farther west past Martin-Gropius-Bau, then swung north along Ebert-Strasse, across Unter den Linden, leaving the Brandenburg Gate in East Berlin and the Reichstag in the West. Here, at the end of the 1980s, the East German government threw in the towel. Soon most of the wall was rubble, along with—so it seemed—the movement that grew from the writings of Marx and Engels, who studied at Humboldt University, a few hundred yards eastward along Unter den Linden.

Movements and political parties wither away when they lose touch, barricade themselves behind dead ideas and armed policemen. But look now at a braver prospect that continues to unfold—as it did through the twilight and collapse of Communist parties in the GDR and the Soviet Union—thousands of miles east of the old Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse.

Early in May a left front led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) swept West Bengal with a three-fourths majority, winning 235 seats out of 293 declared. In a strictly supervised poll, it was the coalition's biggest win since the heyday of the CPI-M's land reforms in 1987, the left's seventh win in polling for West Bengal's state legislature and the fifteenth straight victory (if you take elections to the Central Parliament from West Bengal into account) since the voters put the left in power in 1977. In a state with a population nearing 100 million, about 40 million people, close to 80 percent of the eligible electorate, voted in West Bengal to give the CPI-M-led left front this kind of win.

In these regional elections the left also swept the southwestern state of Kerala (population: 32 million) with a three-fourths majority, the biggest left victory ever in Kerala's history. The leftist Democratic Front won two-thirds of the seats, with the CPI-M itself prevailing in sixty-one of the ninety-eight seats secured by the alliance. In Kerala's upland district of Wyanad, which I visited last year and where farmers have been committing suicide amid the devastations of neoliberal "reforms," the left front won all three seats for the first time in the history of Kerala.

Among the biggest losers in Kerala was the reactionary Indian Union Muslim League, with countless thousands of Muslims, especially young people and women, going against them this time. The league lost seats it had held for decades. The Muslim minority knew a few things about the left: In no state ruled by the left has there ever been a communal riot unleashing sectarian violence.

All in all, this has been a round of enormously significant polls in which the story is the left victory, thus strengthening the left at the center, which means it can prod the Congress-led government a little harder on issues ranging from policies affecting the poor to Delhi's ridiculous Iran policy.

The Indian national media are overwhelmingly anti-left. They made fools of themselves in 2004 and are in the process of doing so again. In West Bengal they offer the explanation that the latest CPI-M victory is all due to the splendid personality of Buddhadev Bhattacharya, chief minister of West Bengal, a man the elite see, in their own purblind optics, as a great "reformer." In fact, the left has always been pro-reforms, in a decent use of the word, meaning land reform and labor reform, which they believe are a prerequisite to other kinds of reforms. They favor foreign investment if it adds to India's technological base, does not undermine public interest and employment, and if it's in productive sectors and not "hot money" that will disappear at the drop of a hat.

They are against privatization that simply means theft of public resources of the sort that newly elected president Evo Morales has just reversed in the natural gas sector in Bolivia. The left has led major agitations against privatization. The left's astounding victories are causing dismay in the major media (with the usual honorable exception of *The Hindu*). The more you talk about the triumphs, the more you have to talk about "them," the left, and to admit that the left's take on "reforms" strikes a mighty chord with vital sections of the public, as it did to the elites' amazement in 2004, when the voters of Andhra Pradesh tossed out the West's great poster boy, Chandrababu Naidu. The elites might have to admit that the left politicians and organizers were the ones talking about hunger, starvation, food security, neoliberal "reforms," the agrarian crisis, the public sector and privatization.

The implications of all this for the health and stability of the United Progressive Alliance government, kept in power by dint of the left coalition's support, are a net positive. But they can be turned to political advantage only if the proper lesson is drawn from the different outcomes: Even in periods of fairly high economic growth, governments like India's current ruling coalition, kept in power by the left, need to pay attention to the reality of mass deprivation and do something about it.

In West Bengal Hidai Sheikh, a 50-year-old farmer, told a reporter from the Indian biweekly *Frontline*, "the CPI-M is the only viable alternative we have. After all, in times of need, they are always there beside us." The red flags I saw in villages in Wyanad are not antique emblems, like the bric-a-brac on sale at Checkpoint Charlie. In political terms they are alive and vibrant. ■

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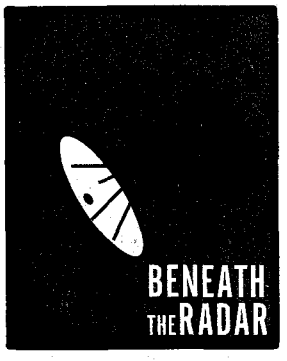
GARY YOUNGE

George & Tony's Not So Excellent Adventure



If democracy is supposed to represent the will of the people, then there is either something wrong with the democracies or something wrong with the people on both sides of the Atlantic.

Less than two years ago George W. Bush was re-elected President of the United States. His pitch: "Stick with me, I have not done a thing wrong." His promise: "I will do more of the same." Six months later British Prime Minister Tony Blair went to the polls with a similar message.

Both have since been as good as their word. Yet both now find themselves mired at dismal levels of public support. Blair has the lowest approval rating of any Labour premier on record. Bush similarly keeps plumbing new depths—currently standing at just over half the level Clinton enjoyed in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal. So both move into the twilight of their political careers with colleagues and commentators looking over their shoulders at potential successors, like social climbers at a cocktail party. From now on they are not fighting for their political lives but for their political obituaries. In the time that remains they are focused not on legislation but legacy.

The trouble is that the issue on which those legacies will be judged is the one where they have given themselves the least room for maneuver and over which they now have the least day-to-day control: Iraq. They sold different wars to different electorates. The Bush Administration responded to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington with a policy of pre-emptive strikes and "regime change" in which weapons of mass destruction were central but not crucial. Whereas Bush used the attacks as the pretext for this war, terrorists used this war as the pretext for attacking London. In his post-9/11 speech Blair promised to "re-order this world around us" but evoked Congo and Kyoto, not Iraq or Iran. Reflecting these differences, most Americans supported the war until last year; barring a brief period at the outset, most Britons never did.

But both got precisely what they wanted. Unchecked by opposition at home, unfettered by international law abroad, unpersuaded by argument at home and abroad, like Sinatra they did it their way. The electorates in both countries now seem to be convinced that "their way" was the wrong way. A Pew poll in March showed that half of Americans favor immediate troop withdrawal and less than a third approve of the way Bush is handling the war. In Britain a *Newsnight* poll revealed 60 percent consider the invasion of Iraq a mistake.

And so, since they have no one else to blame and find themselves out of credit at the Goodwill bank of public opinion, Bush and Blair reach for the arbiter of last resort: history.

Not the history that has passed. Not the history of Kenya or Vietnam, which taught us that the suppression of a colonized people can be sustained only through barbarism. Certainly not the history in which Winston Churchill advocated gassing the Kurds and the US government continued to support Saddam as an ally after the Halabja massacres.

In their desire for legacy they seek not the history that records the past but a history of the future. An abstract verdict that we cannot argue with for the simple reason that it hasn't been made yet.

"History will prove the decision we made to be the right decision," said Bush in 2003.

"If we are wrong," argued Blair, "we will have destroyed a threat that, at its least, is responsible for inhuman carnage and suffering. That is something I am confident history will forgive."

Rebutted by the past and rejected in the present, they can only hope for the future imperfect. Only when we are all dead will the genius of this war finally become clear.

In the meantime, the number of dead as a result of their actions continues to grow. According to a recent morgue report, sectarian fighting claimed 1,100 Iraqi lives in Baghdad alone in the month of April. Meanwhile, the death toll of US soldiers has returned to last year's highs—roughly three a day.

"The diplomatic historian traces foreign affairs as if domestic affairs were offstage disturbances," writes Walter Karp in *The Politics of War*. "The historian of domestic politics treats the explosions of war as if they were offstage disturbances. Were that true we would have to believe that Presidents who faced a mounting sea of troubles at home have nonetheless conducted their foreign policy without the slightest regard for those troubles...that individual Presidents were divided into watertight compartments, one labelled 'domestic' and the other 'foreign.'"

The relationship between this particular foreign misadventure and domestic mishaps is not straightforward. In the United States the war has had an effect on gas prices, the wiretapping scandal and the indictment of Scooter Libby but has rarely emerged as the key issue itself. True, just as many Americans rank the war as the most important issue facing the country as prioritize the economy, immigration and terrorism put together. But that is still only 23 percent. For the rest, Iraq has become a signifier for leaders who do not listen, politicians who mislead and priorities that are out of kilter with the public need. When asked why Bush was getting little credit for economic growth, Karl Rove recently said, "I think it's because the war looms on all political actors."

What the war exposed in both countries was the democratic deficits that failed to check or balance the bellicose machismo of either leader. In Britain the dislocation between public will and foreign policy was blatant. In the United States the public barely got a look in. A supine press and spineless opposition insured that no alternative arguments or strategies would emerge into the mainstream until it was too late. Once they were forced into the open they found a receptive audience. The fact that these two men have fallen from grace so soon after having returned to power does not suggest that their electorates are fickle but that the democracies in which they live are deeply dysfunctional. ■

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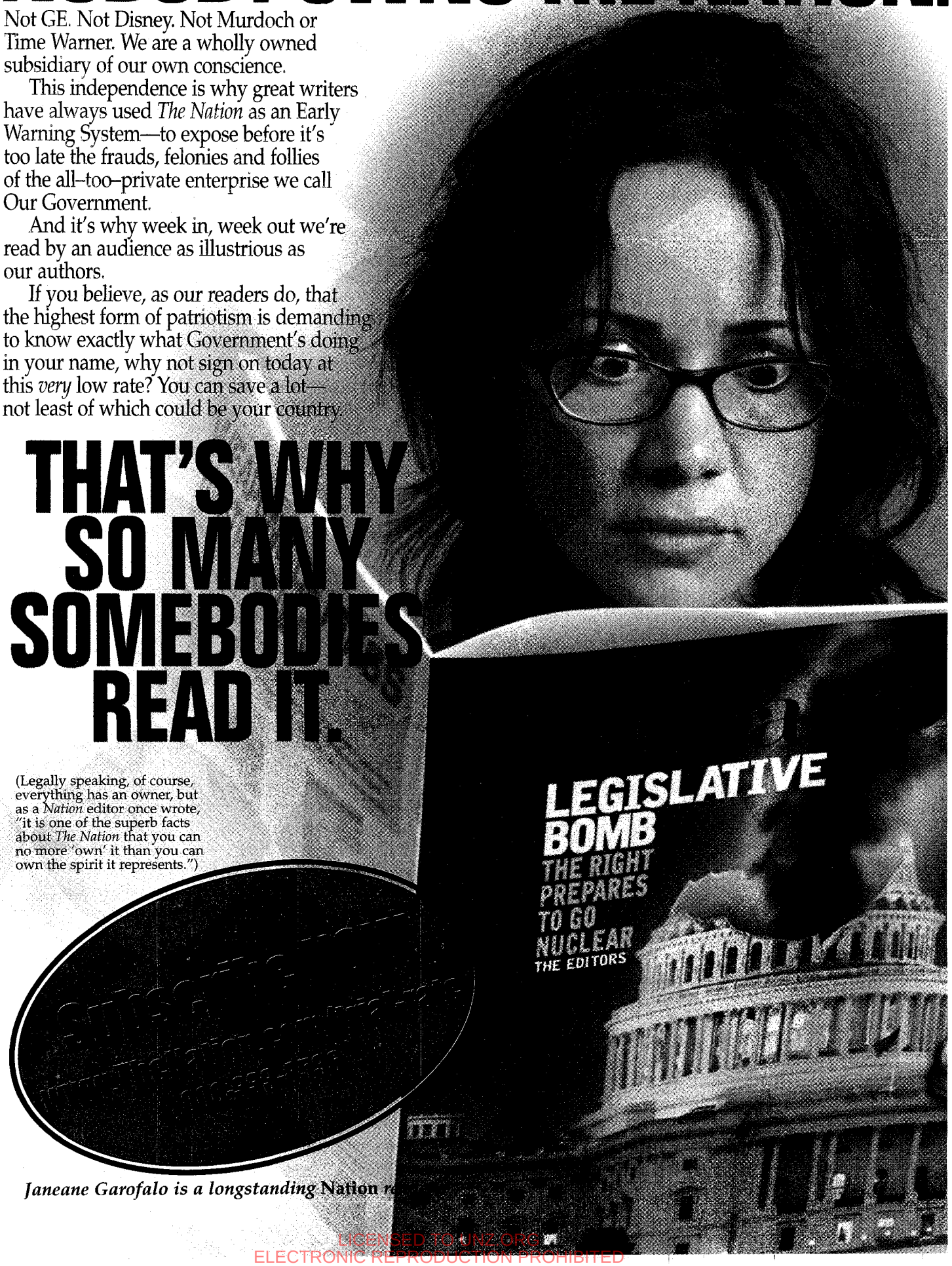

THAT'S WHY SO MANY SOMEBODIES READ IT.

(Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a *Nation* editor once wrote, "it is one of the superb facts about *The Nation* that you can no more 'own' it than you can own the spirit it represents.")

Janeane Garofalo is a longstanding Nation *ra*

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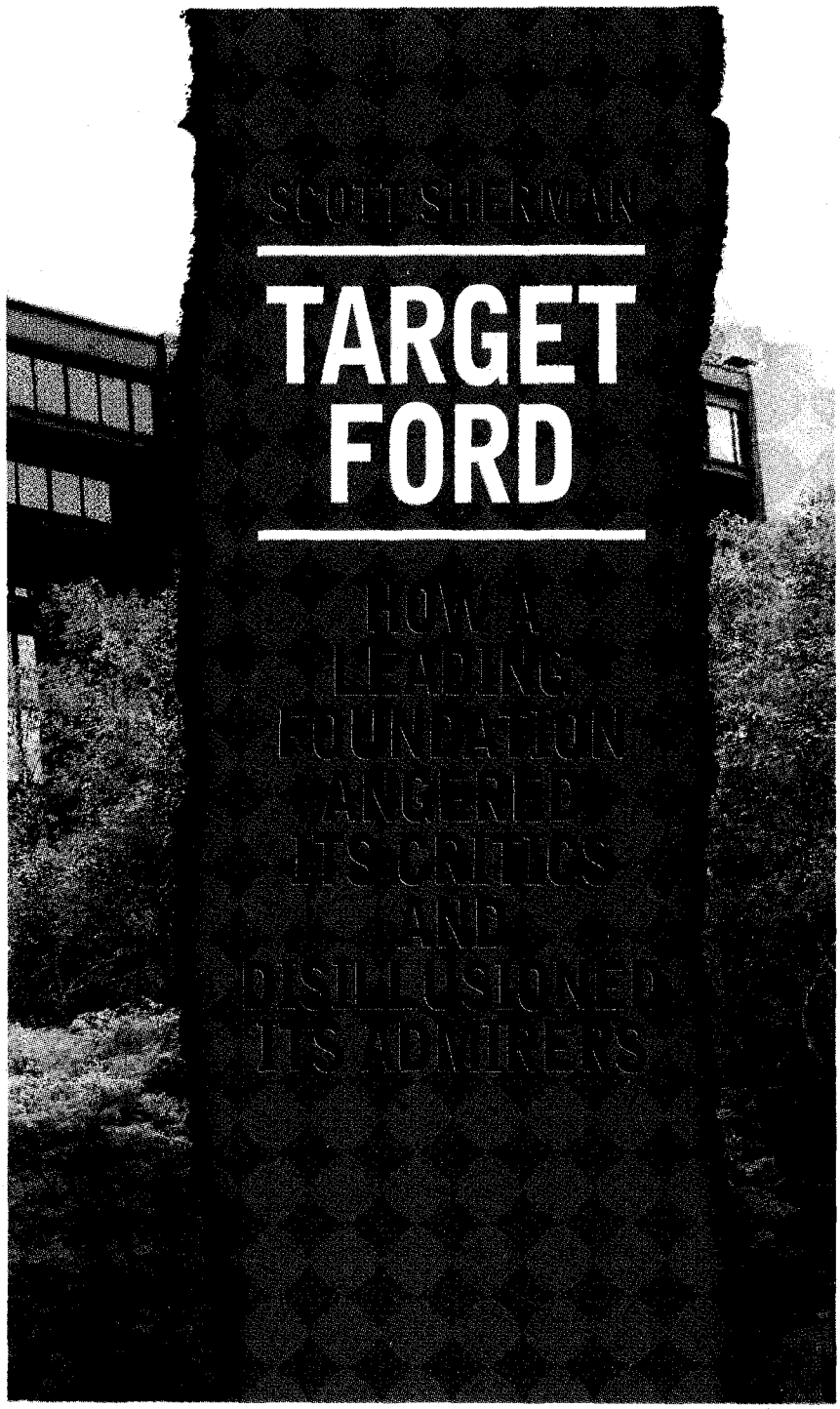

On October 16, 2003, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a New York–based wire service that serves Jewish newspapers worldwide, launched a scorching four-part series on the Ford Foundation. Written by investigative reporter Edwin Black, the series, "Funding Hate," alleged that Ford had provided financial support to several Palestinian nongovernmental organizations accused of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic behavior at the United Nations World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in late summer 2001. A Ford spokesman denied the thrust of Black's allegations: "We have seen no indication that our grantees in Durban or elsewhere engaged in anti-Semitic speech or activities."

One month later, after a political onslaught from members of Congress and some prominent Jewish organizations, Ford reversed itself. In a letter to Jerrold Nadler, a Democratic Congressman from Manhattan's Upper West Side, Susan Berresford, the president of Ford, declared that her institution was "disgusted by the vicious anti-Semitic activity seen at Durban" and that "having reassessed our own information on the Durban Conference...we now recognize that we did not have a complete picture of the activities, organizations and people involved.... We deeply regret that Foundation grantees may have taken part in unacceptable behavior." Berresford reiterated those sentiments in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, which had published an editorial extolling the JTA series, lashing Ford and, sounding an old conservative refrain, lamenting the existence of "a foundation priesthood funded into perpetuity and insulated from public accountability."

To some extent, the 2003 attack on Ford—the worst crisis to hit the foundation since 1969—could be regarded as an example of the increased political scrutiny that US nonprofits have faced since 9/11. Under Presidential Executive Order 13224, enacted in late September 2001, the government obtained broad new power to freeze the assets of any US foundation or charitable organization that is deemed to have provided financial or humanitarian support to "terrorist" organizations. Moreover, the government has encouraged grant-makers and nonprofits to regularly consult a series of computerized terror watch lists maintained by various federal and international agencies—watch lists that are full of dubious aliases, generic names and "false positive" matches. The vague, sweeping language surrounding these regulations and the ways they have put new burdens on charities and foundations have provoked considerable anxiety and confusion throughout the nonprofit sector.

The offensive against Ford, however, has deeper roots. It was a brazen attempt to punish a foundation that since the 1950s has disbursed more than $13 billion to more than 13,000 educational, environmental, human rights, social justice and other organizations in the United States and abroad. Under enormous pressure, and fearful that the accusations might trigger increased

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government oversight of the entire US foundation sector, Ford made a series of concessions to its critics. One of them—a pledge to alter the language in its standard grant-agreement letter, a decision that has powerful civil liberties implications—has left some of the foundation's traditional allies simmering with displeasure and unease. "Historically, Ford's best quality has been its willingness to take some risks and fund some controversial things," says Pablo Eisenberg, a senior fellow at Georgetown's Public Policy Institute and a columnist for *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. "But I think Berresford and Ford caved in unnecessarily to Nadler." Many people in the foundation world agree with Eisenberg, but few will say so publicly.

Two weeks before 9/11, 18,000 people from more than 160 countries descended on Durban for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Racial and caste discrimination, along with the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, were at the top of the agenda, and the conference attempted to build common ground among a very wide range of groups, from the Roma to Australia's Aborigines to Argentina's and Chile's Mapuche Indians. There were some notable successes at Durban—the large Dalit contingent embarrassed the Indian government by drawing attention to the plight of India's 160 million "untouchables," and the human rights of migrants received international recognition—but the conference became mired in controversy over Israel and Palestine.

After it was accused of funding organizations engaging in anti-Semitic activities, Ford altered its standard grant-agreement letter.

Some organizations at Durban complained bitterly about anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic rhetoric and behavior. *Commentary* described pamphlets featuring "hooknosed Jews grinning over the blood-soaked bodies of Palestinians" and leaflets that expressed admiration for Hitler. At a press conference held at Durban and sponsored by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Michael Posner, executive director of the Lawyers Committee, declared: "Anti-Semitic sentiments expressed at the conference are repugnant and reprehensible." Supporters of Israel were especially infuriated by the final text of the official NGO declaration, a controversial document that blamed Israel for "acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing"; demanded the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories; and called for the imposition of a "policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state."

In the wake of Durban, Black noted, Jewish organizational leaders singled out one Palestinian NGO—the Palestinian Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW)—for much of the anti-Israel agitation at the conference. In his series Black alleged that LAW staffers occupied leadership positions on key steering committees; conducted workshops at which Israel was pilloried; and gave South African delegates a preconference tour of Gaza and the West Bank to highlight the similarities between apartheid and the Israeli occupation. LAW, Black noted, was a Ford grantee—having received $1.1 million since 1997. (Another group at Durban, the Palestinian NGO Network, which had received more than $1.4 million from Ford, was also targeted by pro-Israel forces.) Black's stark, tendentious series had one principal objective: to tar the Ford Foundation with the brush of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. One might have expected Ford to respond energetically to accusations of this sort, but at no point did the foundation provide a detailed public rebuttal to the allegations in Black's series—allegations that still hang in the air. This past April the *Detroit News* proclaimed that Ford has a "reputation for backing causes tied to terrorism and anti-Semitism." More than two years later, Ford is still very reluctant to confront Black's reporting. Spokesperson Marta Tellado will only say this: "We did not, and do not today, believe that he accurately portrayed our grant-making."

The reporting by Black—a blustery muckraker who has written extensively about the Holocaust and Zionism—was not limited to the events at Durban; it was also a deeper assault on Ford's grant-making. Black obtained a sixty-page audit of LAW by the accounting firm Ernst & Young that had been commissioned by some of LAW's thirty or so European and American donors—many of which, like Ford, had developed deep concerns about LAW's fiduciary practices. According to Black, the audit showed that LAW had mismanaged several million dollars. Today LAW no longer exists, and none of its former executives could be located.

Black's series had powerful reverberations. A few days after it concluded, the American Jewish Congress called on lawmakers in Washington to examine the tax-exempt status of foundations like Ford—on the grounds that Ford, through its Palestinian grantees, may have financed "terrorists and terror-related activities." Shortly thereafter Berresford received a letter from Representative Nadler and nineteen members of Congress demanding that Ford "investigate these allegations fully and expeditiously." On November 13, 2003, Senator Rick Santorum also requested a formal investigation of Ford, and Senator Charles Grassley, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, expressed his concerns about the allegations directed at the foundation.

Ford's critics included two of the most powerful members of the American Jewish establishment: Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League and Malcolm Hoenlein of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Also critical were *New Republic* editor in chief (and Jewish Telegraphic Agency board member) Martin Peretz, who insisted that Ford "wanted to squeeze Israel, and they allied themselves with despicable people to do so"; the *New York Sun*, which printed the JTA series and subsequently asked for Berresford's resignation in an editorial; and David Horowitz's *FrontPage Magazine*. A month after Black's series, the JTA reported that Ford "seems to be in disarray over its next move."

On November 17, 2003, Ford issued its response to Nadler: a detailed and deferential letter in which Berresford announced

Scott Sherman is a Nation *contributing writer. Garrett Ordower contributed research to this article.*

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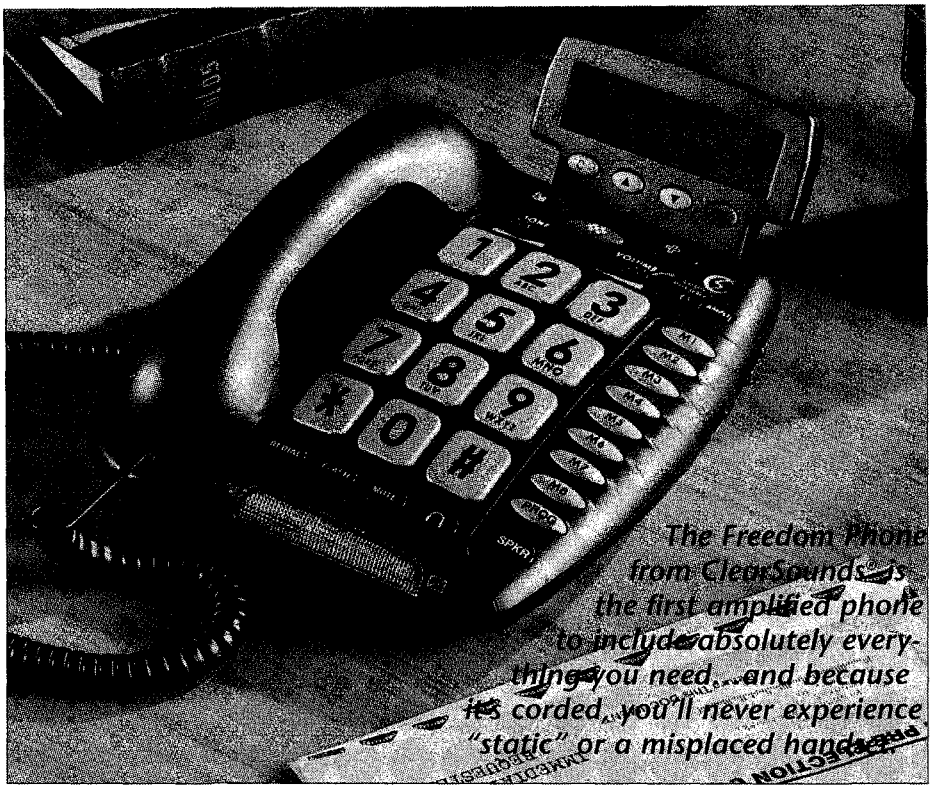
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that Ford had decided to stop funding LAW; that it had "engaged the international accounting firm KPMG to create a risk matrix" to establish which Ford grantees will be audited; and that the foundation would soon turn its attention and resources to the "alarming rise of anti-Semitism around the world."

Perhaps most significant, Berresford announced that Ford's standard grant-agreement letter would be overhauled. Seven weeks later, Ford unveiled the new language in a brief memo to its 5,000 grantees: "By countersigning this grant letter, you agree that your organization will not promote or engage in violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state, nor will it make sub-grants to any entity that engages in these activities." Moreover, the prohibition "*applies to all of the organization's funds, not just those provided through a grant from Ford.*" [Emphasis added.] Georgetown's Pablo Eisenberg, a singular maverick in the tight-lipped foundation world, calls this a "most unusual" and "excessive" stipulation. Says Eisenberg, "Who is Ford to say what an organization can do with Soros money, for example?"

'It's difficult to see how this clause would not run up against the basic principle of protected speech.' —letter from universities to Ford

Berresford's announcement triggered indignation and dismay from some Ford staffers who felt she had capitulated to outside critics by instituting grant language that is vague and open-ended, on the one hand, yet unmistakably direct in its unstated reference to Israel, on the other. "Susan is very tough and principled," a former Ford staffer says, "so they must have really twisted her arm to get her to put in that new grant language." Other foundation executives share that dismay. Says one: "This is the kind of language that, had it been from the government, the ACLU would have to sue." (Ford is not the only private foundation whose grant language has been criticized. The Rockefeller Foundation's language, while less problematic, was also debated, as was the language of other foundations.)

In a ten-minute phone interview that Berresford granted to *The Nation*, she defended her decision to alter Ford's grant letter and denied it was done under duress. "We wanted to make very explicit and clear what our values were," Berresford said. "We don't want to support organizations that promote or engage in violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state. Those are our values. I think that's what the public expects of us. I'm very proud to state those values clearly."

Nadler hailed the agreement with Ford as a "critical new chapter in the fight against anti-Semitism and the delegitimization of Israel's right to exist." But other critics in Congress remained dissatisfied with Ford's written response to Nadler: Santorum and Grassley expressed their desire to push ahead with hearings about the practices of American foundations, and the *Wall Street Journal* urged them to proceed with such an inquiry. Nadler's own allies were somewhat divided about what to do next: Some Jewish leaders wanted a full Congressional investigation, while Abraham Foxman of the ADL declared himself against hearings. Nadler, for his part, feared that an investigation could unfairly target liberal foundations. A JTA story from early 2004 bluntly outlined some of the potential hazards of applying excessive pressure on the Ford Foundation: "Certainly, there are things for the Jewish community to gain from good relations with a foundation as big as Ford." Foxman himself informed the JTA: "At the end of the day, I assume they will fund some project submitted to them by a mainstream Jewish organization."

"The Ford Foundation," Dwight Macdonald wrote in 1956, "is a large body of money completely surrounded by people who want some." Established in Michigan in 1936 by Edsel Ford, the foundation formally separated itself from Ford family control in 1950. (Over the past year, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox, a Republican, has waged a bare-knuckled offensive to pressure Ford to increase its spending in the state where it was chartered.) In 1955 the foundation made a decision to sell 10 million shares of auto company stock, for which it received $641 million, the bulk of which it promptly distributed to 600 colleges and universities, 3,500 nonprofit hospitals and 44 medical schools. In the 1950s and early '60s Ford provided substantial funding for burgeoning area studies research at leading universities and for ambitious international projects involving population control and agricultural production in the developing world. Ford had close ties to the government in those years; according to *The Cultural Cold War* by Frances Stonor Saunders, Ford collaborated with the CIA.

Amid the political turbulence of the 1960s and '70s, Ford, under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy, deepened its commitment to human rights, poverty reduction and racial justice. It gave major grants to the NAACP and helped to establish the Public Broadcasting Service, the National Council of La Raza, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Urban Institute, the Native American Rights Fund and public-interest law centers in the United States, to name just a few of its grantees from that heady era. Today, from its headquarters on East 43rd Street, which rises from a lush atrium and is decorated with works by Picasso and Chagall, Ford, the second-largest foundation in the United States, with assets of $11.6 billion, remains ambitious in its grant-making: In 2004 it gave away nearly $500 million to 2,000 grantees, ranging from the Steve Biko Foundation of South Africa ($150,000 for activities commemorating the life and work of Biko) to the Navsarjan Trust of India ($200,000 to support the human rights of Dalits in the violence-prone state of Gujarat) and the Apollo Theater Foundation of Harlem ($250,000 to help restore the historic theater).

Right-wing assaults have been a recurring motif in Ford's history. Westbrook Pegler, the midcentury syndicated columnist, dubbed Ford a "front for dangerous communists," and in the early 1950s Ford was the subject of two separate Congressional investigations into subversive and Communist-influenced activity among foundations.

In 1969 critics of the foundation sector exacted their revenge. In the tumultuous days after Robert Kennedy's assassination in 1968, Bundy had arranged fellowships totaling $131,000 for eight members of Kennedy's staff. The following year, the House Ways and Means Committee opened hearings on the activities of American foundations, and Bundy was a star witness. He vigor-

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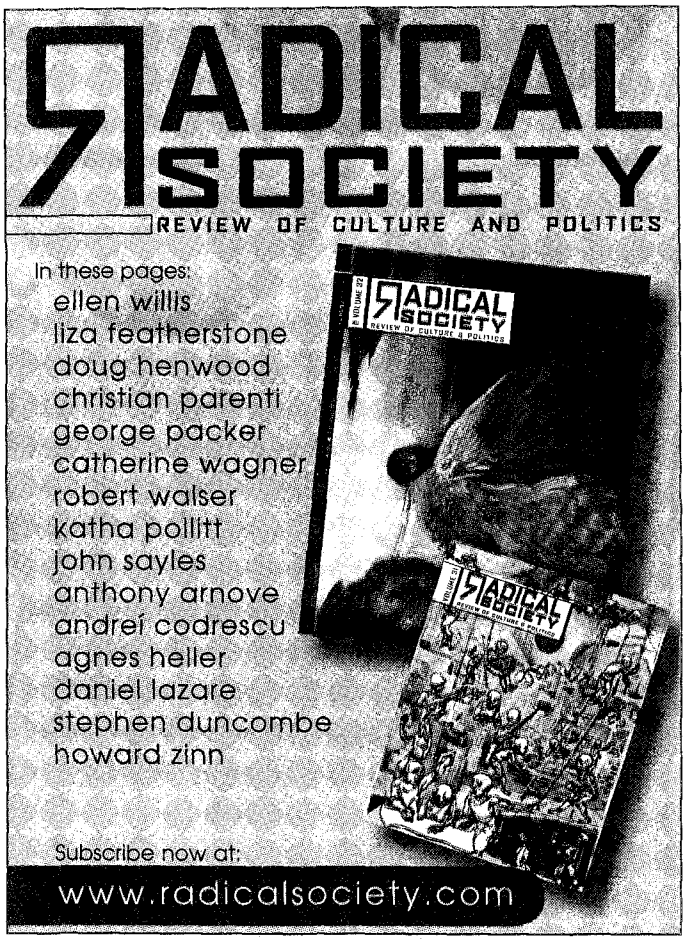
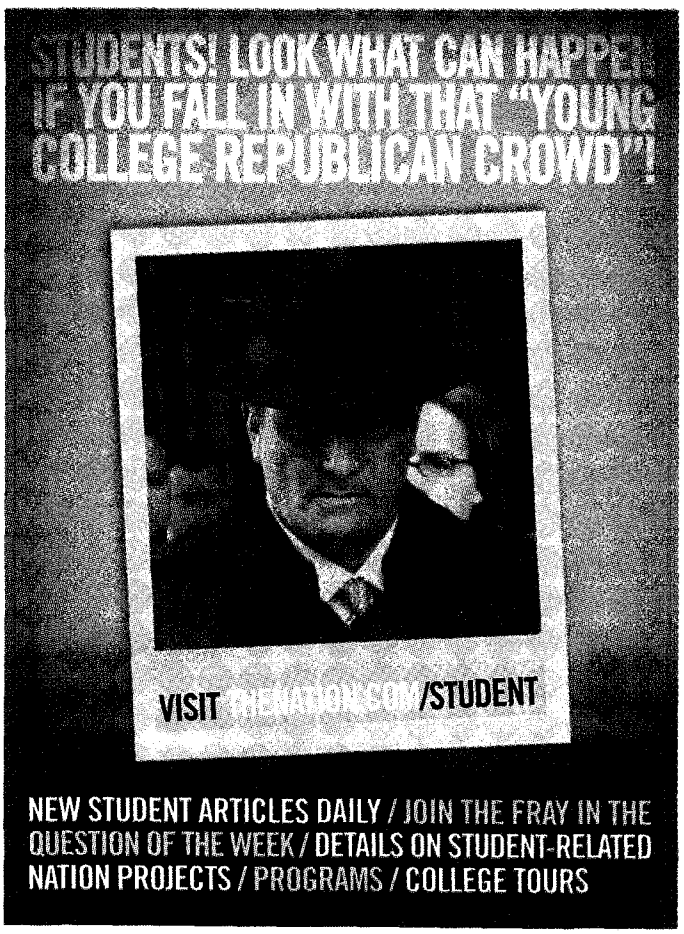
ously defended Ford and the entire foundation sector, but his arrogance infuriated his Congressional antagonists, who went on to enact legislation forcing all private foundations to pay a 4 percent excise tax on net annual investment income and to distribute 6 percent of their assets each year. The 1969 legislation was viewed as draconian by a foundation sector that—then as now—opposed any type of government oversight. Indeed, many foundation leaders held Bundy personally responsible for what they saw as a debacle; but other observers viewed the 1969 legislation as an essential step toward public accountability.

Ford watchers insist that the trauma of 1969 remains, to this day, embedded in the DNA of top Ford executives. (Berresford began her career at Ford in 1970, when she was 27, and worked her way to the top.) "Ford lives with the legacy that Bundy's arrogance cost the field," says Emmett Carson, president of the Minneapolis Foundation and a leading figure in the philanthropic sector. Meanwhile, prominent conservatives maintained a keen interest in the foundation. "The Ford Foundation," presidential aide Patrick Buchanan wrote in a memo to Richard Nixon in 1972, "has become the Exchequer and Command Post for the entire American Left." Buchanan had fantasies of his own. Attempts to expose Ford's ties to liberal organizations might well, he suggested to Nixon, "produce a cornucopia of Ford funds for Republican and Conservative causes—to spare Ford from being taken apart by the Congress at some future tax reform hearings."

Historically, criticism of foundations has not been the exclusive province of the right. The principal critic of the sector in the 1960s, Representative Wright Patman of Texas, was a Democrat. Likewise, in 2003 Ford's primary antagonist was Jerrold Nadler, a stalwart progressive who is also a powerful supporter of Israel. In a recent interview Nadler noted that anti-foundation sentiment was rising within the Senate Finance Committee in 2003, and especially among Grassley and Santorum. To some extent, that sentiment flowed from newspaper reports about lavish salaries and perks for foundation executives. Black's series thrust the foundation sector under a harsh glare once again. In Nadler's words, a "well-orchestrated campaign to destroy the sector...a Republican jihad" was gathering force, and it became his duty to discipline the Ford Foundation in order to save it. "My principal concern," Nadler says, "was with the anti-Semitism that was being tolerated by some of these nonprofits on the left. And I didn't want this to be used as a weapon with which to destroy very essential institutions like the Ford Foundation." (Nadler boasts that his maneuvering was successful: Santorum and Grassley never held the promised hearings because "we cut the ground out from under them.") Some foundation experts contend that Nadler overstates the extent to which the sector was under siege by Republicans in 2003 and that he conflates "destruction" with regulation. Says Pablo Eisenberg, "I never heard anything about any 'jihad,' or that they had a vengeance against foundations."

Nadler's office worked closely with Ford to draft the new grant language. Berresford declined to elaborate on the specific ways the new language was formulated, and the full extent to which outside parties contributed to the final text. But it was clearly a collaborative effort. Says Nadler: "It was a back-and-

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forth negotiation between my office and Ford and some of the Jewish groups." In late 2003 the *Forward* named the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League as groups that were deeply involved in the Ford negotiations. Berresford insists that the grant language was "not forced on us in any way, shape, or form."

Ford's grantees, many of whom are dependent on the foundation's largesse, were hardly in a position to contest the new grant language. But a handful of grantees did resist—beginning with the nation's top universities. On April 27, 2004, Ford received a letter signed by nine university provosts, from Princeton, Columbia, Stanford, Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, MIT, Yale and Cornell. These are some of Ford's most distinguished grantees, with whom it has a lengthy history. In 1965, for instance, Harvard established its John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics with a $2 million Ford grant.

In their letter, first reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, the provosts expressed their "serious concerns" about the new language, on the grounds that it attempts to "regulate universities' behavior and speech beyond the scope of the grant." "It is difficult to see," they wrote, "how this clause would not run up against the basic principle of protected speech on our campuses." For instance, if Columbia University, a major Ford grantee, were to sponsor a Palestinian film festival—as it did in 2003—all of Columbia's Ford grants could theoretically be jeopardized if a film in that series was deemed to be supportive of "violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state." Pro-Israel critics at Columbia assailed the film festival on those very grounds.

'The censorious efforts of private groups...and the intimidation of Ford by elected officials... have been rewarded.' —Wendy Kaminer, ACLU

In mid-2004 Ford responded to the provosts with a "side letter" affirming that the foundation had no desire to interfere with the speech "in classrooms, faculty publications, student remarks in chat rooms, or other speech that express the views of the individuals." The grant letter, Ford insisted, applies only "to the official speech and conduct of the university and to speech or conduct that the university explicitly endorses." The unity of the nine universities collapsed when Harvard accepted Ford's side letter in the summer of 2004. (Harvard's provost, Steven Hyman, and its president, Lawrence Summers, declined to be interviewed.) Some people close to the negotiations between Ford and the provosts are convinced that if the nine elite universities had maintained their unity, they might, in the end, have pressured Ford to change the language. (In their letter, the provosts had offered a proposed revision that Ford found unacceptable.)

If Harvard was particularly eager to settle with Ford, Stanford held out the longest before reluctantly accepting the side letter in late 2004. But the issue remains somewhat controversial at Stanford. At a meeting of its academic council on January 20, 2005, Provost John Etchemendy informed the faculty about Ford's "official speech...of the university" clause and declared, "Unfortunately they would not clarify exactly what that meant." Etchemendy warned the faculty that Stanford's administration could not protect their Ford grants. Today, Stanford administrators are quick to acknowledge that they are still concerned about the lack of clarity in the side letter and still unclear about the limits of the "official speech" clause. Does it cover the speech of professors? Does it cover Stanford University Press (which has a distinguished list in Middle East Studies)? Does it cover the Stanford alumni magazine? Says vice provost Stephanie Kalfayan: "Those are great questions. You should ask Ford." Susan Berresford says, "This is something we worked out with the universities. The side letters are clear. I don't see the value of going further into this."

In 2004 one other Ford grantee, the Drug Policy Alliance, joined the elite universities in contesting Ford's grant language. DPA is led by Ethan Nadelmann, executive director, and the tenacious Ira Glasser, DPA's president and the former head of the ACLU. On June 18, 2004, Nadelmann and Glasser dispatched a blunt letter to Berresford: "We believe that on its face, the overbreadth and vagueness of your language sweeps within its ban speech and advocacy that are critical to our work." They went on, as the provosts did, to request a minor revision in Ford's grant language: "a simple, supplementary sentence making clear that the ban...*does not extend to advocacy or speech, but only to lawless, violent or discriminatory conduct.*" [Emphasis in original.] And they warned Berresford that an ominous precedent was being established:

> The infamous blacklists of the 1950s were similarly imposed by the private sector (in response, as here, to pressure from government officials) and similarly implemented their restrictions through economic, not criminal, sanctions.... Today, everyone wonders how those blacklists got started, how they became so entrenched, why so few (except the victims) protested. This is how it begins: with restrictions on speech and advocacy that would be unconstitutional if the state imposed them, imposed instead by private sector funding, with the government lurking in the background.

In the end Ford and DPA could not agree, and in late 2004 DPA returned a $200,000 grant to the Ford Foundation. "Some of DPA's supporters have told me that we should just take the money, regardless of the way the grant letter is worded," Nadelmann wrote in a 2004 letter to his membership. "But this is a fight about fundamental principles from which we could not walk away."

In late June 2004 DPA's letters to Berresford were released to the ACLU national board, several of whose members had, six weeks earlier, scrutinized the *Wall Street Journal* article about Ford's conflict with the elite universities and wondered why an ACLU spokesman quoted therein neglected to criticize Ford's restrictions. Two gadflies on the ACLU board, Wendy Kaminer and Michael Meyers, immediately questioned executive director Anthony Romero's decision in early 2004 to accept a grant from Ford, which had been a generous benefactor: Between 1999 and 2004, the ACLU Foundation received $17 million from Ford. Romero, who spent ten years as a high-ranking Ford executive,

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was soon forced to admit to his board that not only had he advised Ford on the new language but that he had urged the foundation to "just parrot back language in existing federal law"—i.e., the Patriot Act, which the ACLU was then contesting with considerable vigor. In October 2004 the ACLU refused several Ford grants, which totaled more than $1 million.

Today Romero is contrite about his 2003 advice to Ford. "I made a mistake," he says. "I was too slow to understand the broader context. I didn't connect the dots." And he is blunt about his former employer: "Ford made a big mistake with the grant language," Romero says. "I think it has created a pall over the foundation and its grantees. It has only emboldened its critics. And it has cast a shadow over the work of one of the most important foundations at a very critical time."

Some ACLU board members wish that Romero had used whatever influence he had with Berresford, of whom he is something of a protégé, to forestall the new grant language. "Because he was consulted by Berresford privately, before the new grant restrictions were written in stone, Anthony had a unique opportunity to advise her how to prohibit grantees from engaging in activities related to terrorism without restricting or chilling their speech," says Kaminer. "We can't know if his advice would have been followed, but we do know that he squandered the opportunity to give it." Kaminer adds: "The advocacy rights of all Ford grantees have been chilled. The censorious efforts of private groups angered by Ford's funding policies—and the intimidation of Ford by elected officials enlisted by these groups—have been rewarded."

Nadler denies that he coerced Ford, and says he has no misgivings about the foundation's new grant language. He insists that Ford, as a private-sector institution with no constitutional obligations, can do as it wishes. "It's not a restriction on speech," Nadler says of the new language. "It's an agreement not to engage in terrorism. It hasn't restricted anybody's speech."

But some leading experts on philanthropy are much less sanguine than Nadler. "Nadler is certainly technically correct. The First Amendment is a limitation on government, not private, action," says Princeton's Stanley Katz, president emeritus of the American Council of Learned Societies. "So strictly speaking Ford cannot be criticized for violating a constitutional right. But Ford has set itself up as a liberal philanthropic foundation, and the issue is whether it is violating its own freedom-of-expression principles. I think it has, and I would be surprised if Susan Berresford and others there were not keenly conscious of a tension between what they felt forced to do and what they truly believe in. Ford would not fund a private organization it knew to be systematically violating the freedom of expression, and it ought not to engage in such practices itself."

"'Violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any state' is very problematic" grant language, says Professor Michael Olivas of the University of Houston Law Center, who closely monitors the nonprofit sector. Olivas wonders why Ford included vague and open-ended terminology like "bigotry" in its grant letter when it could simply have stated that it will not fund any organization proscribed by the State Department.

Why did Ford agree to alter its grant language? Berresford is reticent on the subject, as is one Ford trustee who met with

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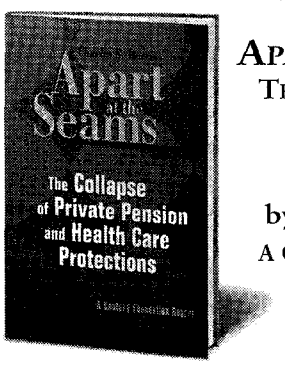

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Nadler. But one reason behind Ford's action may have been its desire to prevent additional government regulation of the foundation sector. In May 2003, five months before the JTA series, the sector—in which Berresford is very much a leader—was jolted by legislation proposed by Roy Blunt and Harold Ford Jr. that was designed to stimulate charitable giving. Federal law now requires foundations to pay out 5 percent of their assets annually, and the legislation would have required that the mandatory minimum payout exclude administrative costs such as rent and salaries—a provision that could have forced foundations to spend more money. The Ford Foundation (and the Council on Foundations, which represents 2,000 grant-makers) strenuously opposed the provision. Indeed, the foundation was involved in the sector's decision to hire Bill Paxon, the former Republican Congressman, currently a lobbyist for Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, to represent its interests before Congress.

Some foundation experts insist that the foundation overreacted to what it saw as a higher payout requirement. According to Pablo Eisenberg, who advocates higher foundation payout rates, "Susan Berresford, whose Eleventh Commandment is 'Thou Shalt Not Increase the Payout,'" privately argued that "this was an attack by the right wing to do away with liberal foundations like the Ford Foundation, which is total nonsense."

The Congressional effort to exclude administrative costs was eventually beaten back by the foundations, but suspicion toward the sector lingered in the minds of some in Congress. And then Black's series appeared in the JTA. People close to Berresford say that, faced with massive pressure from Nadler, Jewish organizations and newspapers like the *New York Sun*, she recalled the events of 1969 and the political price the entire sector could, once again, pay if Black's series reignited the campaign for a higher payout or other regulatory measures.

It's too early to determine how the events of 2003 have influenced Ford's overall grant-making, and the possible extent to which program officers and trustees are distancing themselves from grantees that undertake controversial and politically risky work. What seems clear is that Ford has turned its attention to anti-Semitism, as it promised Nadler it would. And the foundation has done it in part by funding some of its chief antagonists from 2003. In 2004 Ford gave $361,000 to Abraham Foxman's Anti-Defamation League for its World of Difference Institute, whose mission is to "combat racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of prejudice and bigotry," followed by an additional $1.1 million in 2006 for the same project. (ADL's last Ford grant was in 1967, and Foxman declined to be interviewed.) The American Jewish Committee received $400,000 in 2006, its first grant since 1998. David Harris, head of the AJC, did not return phone calls. In 2004 Ford also gave $625,000 to the Simon Wiesenthal Center—which chaired the delegation of Jewish organizations at Durban—to develop a tolerance and diversity training program for New York's criminal justice community, the first grant the Wiesenthal Center has received from Ford.

ADL still has Ford under a microscope, and has heavily criticized recent actions by the foundation, including its decision to fund a conference on academic boycotts sponsored by the American Association of University Professors in Bellagio, Italy. The conference was eventually canceled.

"Large foundations," Dwight Macdonald observed in 1956, "are timid beasts." To compare Berresford's response to the crisis of 2003 with McGeorge Bundy's response to the events of 1969, when he was dragged before Congress, is to realize that Macdonald's quip is largely but not completely accurate. In *The Color of Truth*, his fine biography of McGeorge and William Bundy, Kai Bird noted that in response to the political assault from conservative critics in 1969, Bundy "essentially refused to back off." Under his direction, Ford defiantly stepped up its funding of a wide range of antipoverty and social justice groups. In his last annual report as president, in 1978, Bundy urged his colleagues at Ford not to "shy away from controversial activity."

By instituting the new grant language in 2004, Berresford undoubtedly believed that she was acting in the best interests of both Ford and the foundation sector. Emmett Carson of the Minneapolis Foundation says that Ford may have seen the grant language as "a compromise they could live with." Carson adds: "In hindsight, ten or twenty years from now, we may be prepared to say it was a very shrewd decision, a very modest compromise, at a time when the field lacked the voice, lacked the courage, lacked the sophistication to have the level of debate that was necessary."

The historical evidence is beginning to accumulate, and not in a way that honors Ford. In one of their letters to Berresford, Nadelmann and Glasser wrote, "On the day the government decides to use your restriction as a precedent and model for its own, it will be too late to say you're sorry. Do not do this, Susan." That day arrived on February 7, 2005, when the Justice Department approvingly (and repeatedly) cited Ford's new grant language—along with the grant language of the Rockefeller and Charles Stewart Mott foundations—in its motion to dismiss in *American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, et al. v. Office of Personnel Management, et al.*

In 2004 the ACLU and a dozen other organizations sued the OPM, a government agency, to prevent it from forcing nonprofits to certify that they do "not knowingly employ individuals or contribute funds to organizations" on terrorist watch lists before receiving any of the $250 million donated annually through the Combined Federal Campaign, which allows federal employees to allocate funds to various charities and nonprofits. Berresford's response to the Justice Department's citation of Ford? "The government finds its own language to express its own standards and views," she says, "and they're free to do that in whatever way they see fit." Wendy Kaminer of the ACLU laments the fact that "the Bush Administration has invoked Ford's restrictions as a model for its own restrictions on US charities."

In recent months, however, the Rockefeller Foundation has distanced itself from Ford. Rockefeller has changed its grant language for 2006 in a way that satisfies groups like the ACLU and in a way that is consistent with what the elite universities requested of Ford in 2004. Indeed, Rockefeller's president, Judith Rodin, was the president of the University of Pennsylvania in 2004 when that institution challenged Ford. Susan Berresford insists she has no plans to alter Ford's grant language. "Ford," says Anthony Romero of the ACLU, "really stands alone at this point." ■

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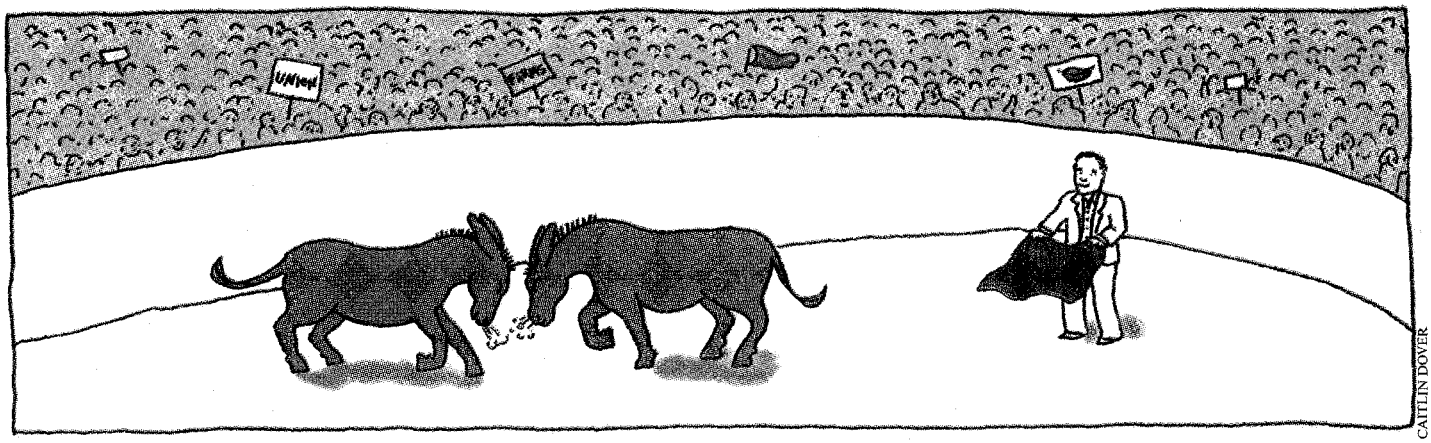
THE CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS TWO BLAND LIBERAL POLS VYING FOR THE GUBERNATORIAL NOMINATION. BOTH OF THEM LACK POPULIST SEX APPEAL.



CAITLIN DOVER

The Race to Replace Arnold: Running on Empty

MARC COOPER

Sacramento

On the first morning of the state Democratic convention in April, a room full of delegates brought together by the California Labor Federation got a tasty extra with their standard hotel ballroom breakfast. State Treasurer and gubernatorial candidate Phil Angelides stood before them, and after a heroic introduction from US Representative Nancy Pelosi, he proceeded to dish out industrial-sized portions of just the sort of fare for which hungry and disappointed Democratic activists from coast to coast have been longing. Here was a fighting, unrepentant Dem. "If we do this right, if we stand up for working men and women, if we stand up for the Democratic principles of fairness that built this country," said the tall, wonkish-looking 52-year-old candidate, his voice rising, his right hand churning the air with every syllable, "if we campaign with passion and principle, then come November of this year we are going to drive Arnold Schwarzenegger out of the Statehouse!"

After the thunderclaps of applause, Angelides—who has been campaigning as an unabashed liberal—moved on to the rhetorical dessert. "After thirty years of assault from the right," he told the labor delegates, "we're going to go back on the offensive and we're going to have a government on the side of hardworking men and women, and California is going to be a model."

When Angelides addressed the entire convention floor later in the day, greeted by a fluttering sea of blue-and-gold ANGELIDES FOR GOVERNOR placards, he struck the same passionate, populist note. And after his opponent, State Controller Steve Westly, made his own pitch promising to unseat "the wrong man with the wrong plan" currently occupying the governor's chair, the delegates handed the official party endorsement to Angelides. And by an impressive 68–27 percent margin. That blowout vote was a certain indicator that Angelides's progressive posture, his repeated denunciations of "wobbly-kneed Democrats" and his thinly veiled references to his opponent as being "Arnold-lite" had lit a fire among the party delegates.

But now, on the eve of California's June 6 primary, neither candidate's campaign has succeeded in mobilizing or inspiring much of the Democratic grassroots. And though Governor Schwarzenegger was handed a crushing defeat last fall when his slate of reform propositions was voted down [see Cooper, "Is the Terminator in Free-Fall?" October 31, 2005], and though the favorability ratings of the President he campaigned for have dipped near the freezing point, most political observers in this biggest and bluest of blue states still figure that Arnold's the favorite for re-election in the fall.

Indeed, the current predicament of California Democrats raises serious questions on a national scale as the midterm elections draw nearer and as the presidential run for 2008 comes into focus. The California governor's race tests the competing strategies of Democrats running to the left and to the center; it spotlights the uncomfortable truth that the plummeting popularity of one party doesn't automatically translate into support for the other; and it highlights what is often the strange hollowness of modern American political campaigning.

Perhaps the most dramatic measure of the disconnection between the Democratic establishment and its own voters was Angelides's status as "underdog," a term he used repeatedly as I accompanied him a few weeks ago through a half-dozen Bay Area meetings with activists. It accurately described his status at

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least until these closing days of campaigning, when the race has tightened up. Being the underdog in your own party's primary when you've raised $20 million, when you're the incumbent second-term state treasurer, when you've lined up the endorsements of both of California's US senators, its popular Assembly speaker, hundreds of other elected officials and most of the unions and environmental groups tells you a lot not only about the candidate himself but also about the dysfunction of modern American politics, when the official campaign often percolates in an enclosed bubble, remote if not almost totally isolated from the mass of voters.

This is not to say that the purple-shirted crowd of Service Employees International Union stewards in Oakland, or the dedicated squads of volunteer precinct walkers from San Francisco's Central Labor Council with whom Angelides met, weren't real Democrats. On the contrary—these are the most committed and fervent of party loyalists. "We're proud to have been the first union to have endorsed Phil," said Ken Burt, political director of the California Federation of Teachers. "He's taken the bold step of saying he's going to raise taxes on the rich to fund public education. And that's the sort of direct message we like."

'Liberal versus moderate—I don't think that's what's happening,' says veteran Democratic consultant Kam Kuwata.

Lining up the liberal-labor base of the party, however, may no longer be enough to guarantee victory, either within the party or against a powerful Republican incumbent like Schwarzenegger. The same day that Angelides won the official party endorsement, a *Los Angeles Times* poll showed him lagging behind Westly by thirteen points among Democratic voters. And it showed Westly handily beating Schwarzenegger in a matchup, while Angelides was locked in a tie with Arnold.

Angelides's strength might also be the source of his weakness. A wealthy developer and land speculator, he has also been a seasoned Democratic activist and pol. He first ran for City Council at the age of 19, and he later became state party chair. Now finishing up his second term as state treasurer, he's earned wide admiration for his smart management of state pension funds, favoring clean and green investments [see William Greider, "The New Colossus," February 28, 2005]. He's been a reliable friend of unions and enviros. And his early garnering of endorsements and some prodigious fundraising were designed to give an air of inevitability to his candidacy.

But it's precisely this sort of "insiderism" that may be hobbling Angelides. In an age when fewer Americans identify with either party, how far will the party core's support take you? Apparently not far enough to shield against the effects of television ads that bypass institutional party structures. Plowing $33 million of his own mega-fortune into his effort, 49-year-old Westly, a former eBay exec, took an early and sustained lead in the race in spite of Angelides's institutional support. Like Angelides, a relatively obscure pol whose name was unknown to millions of Californians, Westly roared out of the box with what everyone agrees was a highly effective TV ad campaign. Always impeccably dressed, nary a crease in his sober suits, the boyish-looking Westly introduced himself to the voters as a pragmatic, can-do, almost nonideological problem solver. His central message, that he is "a new kind of Democrat...the only candidate who can beat Arnold Schwarzenegger," bore the direct imputation that Angelides is too liberal to be elected in November. With Angelides chiding Westly as someone who "stood aside" instead of "standing up" to Schwarzenegger, some analysts have suggested that the California primary is a proxy fight between the moderate and liberal wings of the Democratic Party, a warm-up for an inevitable internecine battle coming in 2008 on the national stage.

Other analysts argue that the deeper divide between Angelides and Westly is more generational than ideological, one of style and tone. Though both candidates are close in age, Westly—coming out of the Silicon Valley world of eBay—has deftly exploited his more with-it, hip, high-tech appeal, while Angelides relies on the traditional imagery of the New Deal coalition. At the state convention, one needed only to traipse through the respective candidates' parties to measure the style gap. Angelides highlighted his immigrant-family-makes-good life story by calling his bash a celebration of his Greek heritage. The crowd in the rather drab ballroom was entertained with some ethnic-dance exhibitions. Westly's ballroom, by contrast, was gussied up with an ironically overstated 1960s Flower Power motif. Fueled by a rumbling live band, Westly took to the dance floor and rocked and rolled with the African-American district attorney of San Francisco, Kamala Harris. As the dance concluded, Harris brushed aside the notion that Westly was any less of a progressive than Angelides. "I respect Angelides but Steve Westly has all of those same core values, from education to affirmative action," Harris told me. "Steve not only has those right values, but he also thinks how he's going to actually win and implement them in a smart way."

Westly vigorously argues that his less partisan tone is one of his strongest attributes because it will appeal to voters rankled by the narrow confines of party politics. "There are some issues on which the governor has been right, like his Million Solar Homes program, and deserves support," Westly said in a conversation with me. "I'm willing to support people when they're right and oppose them when they're wrong. I think people in this state are tired of excessive partisanship." Garry South, former Governor Gray Davis's top consultant and now an adviser to Westly, said, "Steve represents the perfect profile of the sort of Democrat who always wins in California—a social progressive and a fiscal moderate."

Westly may indeed be assuming a less liberal, more centrist stance, but his own record is liberal enough to have won support from the state's largest gay lobby. And the Sierra Club and the United Farm Workers have endorsed both him and Angelides. The contest seems more a case of which Democrat can grab the most attention from a skeptical, often disengaged electorate, which is being addressed mainly as a TV audience.

"Liberal versus moderate—I don't think that's what's happening," says veteran Democratic consultant Kam Kuwata. While not officially supporting either candidate, Kuwata is working

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for Senator Dianne Feinstein, an Angelides campaign co-chair. "Walk out on the mall outside this convention," Kuwata said as the state Democratic confab was breaking up, "and ask someone out there, and they don't even know who's running, let alone who's the liberal and who isn't. This is going to be a low-turnout election, and the challenge to the campaigns will be to surgically find their voters."

A drive down any California freeway or through any urban neighborhood visibly confirms much of Kuwata's dim view: miles and miles without a single bumper sticker or lawn sign. If you watch cable instead of the big networks and don't catch one of the TV spots, you may never know there's an election coming up. When the candidates debated in Los Angeles recently, not a single TV station carried a live broadcast. The entire election process sometimes seems to be taking place in a reduced margin running parallel to everyday life. The emptiness of the California exercise is hardly an exception in national politics, but the vast size of the state brings into bold relief the entropy of modern campaigning. During what was probably the final Angelides-Westly TV debate of the campaign, less than 2 percent of the local viewing audience tuned in to watch, even though the event was held in solidly Democratic San Francisco, a place where both candidates have their highest name recognition.

Whichever Democrat emerges victorious in the primary, he will face a stiff challenge in the November election from Schwarzenegger.

While both Angelides and Westly have decent and defensible records as reliable Democrats, that these two men are the candidates of the biggest state Democratic Party in the country lays bare another jarring reality: Angelides may indeed be a stalwart liberal, but he's also one who has a long record of cozy relationships with other developers and moneyed special interests. Angelides, in fact, made his political bones two decades ago as chief of staff to the legislature's most business-friendly Democrat, Mike Roos. And he's earned a reputation as a sometimes ruthless bare-knuckles campaigner—in an earlier campaign he juxtaposed the image of a former and very liberal, but antiabortion, opponent with that of the murder of an abortion doctor. Westly, for his part, can afford to move more than $20 million from his wallet into his campaign coffers and to become a contender, maybe even governor, by the sheer force of TV ads. He runs as an outsider but spent two decades sitting on the Democratic National Committee. The *Los Angeles Times* has reported that both candidates have used their influence to steer investments by the state pension fund into companies of their respective political contributors.

Couldn't the California Democratic Party, which dominates the state legislature and holds every statewide elected office except governor, have produced at least one or two authentically populist leaders over the past generation? Couldn't it offer a couple of candidates who would challenge Schwarzenegger and inspire their fellow Californians after having risen to prominence as a leader of labor or civil or consumer rights—as someone other than a professional politician?

The increasingly negative tone of the twin campaigns—with Westly attacking Angelides as a rich developer who wants to raise taxes and Angelides responding that Westly is a patsy for Schwarzenegger—isn't likely to generate more voter interest. And some Democratic voters are, of course, conflicted about the role that big money plays in even the most liberal of state political campaigns. No doubt that's why many just ignore the campaigns; others just resign themselves. "I deal with this information by knowing it's absolutely required by the system," said retired attorney Clark Moscrip, who was wearing an ASK ME ABOUT CLEAN MONEY button at the Angelides rally organized by the San Francisco Central Labor Council. "A candidate has no choice but to do that sort of fundraising," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "That's why we need a 'clean money' system. In the meantime, Angelides and Westly attack each other as being beholden, but it's really just a distraction. The truth is, they are really no different on that issue" (though both candidates claim they would support some version of clean-money reform).

Whichever Democrat emerges victorious in the primary—and right now private polls show the race as a near dead heat—he will still face a stiff challenge in November's general election from incumbent Schwarzenegger. Arnold has been making a modest but steady comeback in the polls since his near-fatal defeat in last November's vote on his initiatives. The governor has apologized for his bungled anti-union ballot campaign, has appointed a longtime lesbian activist Democrat as his chief of staff and has been championing a New Deal–style infrastructure rebuilding program. That multibillion-dollar bond deal was hammered out with the Democratic leaders of the legislature, who have been making myriad self-congratulating public appearances with the governor—an unsettling sight, to say the least, to the party's gubernatorial candidates.

The bipartisan schmoozing can't help but favor Schwarzenegger, who has also been offered some political relief by an unexpected windfall of $7.5 billion in unanticipated tax revenues. The governor has shrewdly earmarked the money to pay back debt, restore some social spending cuts and return billions he "borrowed" from schools. That last stroke not only undercuts the ire from one of his stiffest opponents—the teachers' union, with whom he directly negotiated the payback—but it renders one of Angelides's central platform planks dangerously obsolete. Voters might wonder what's the point of raising taxes on the wealthy to "fully fund education," as Angelides vows, if Schwarzenegger just reached a deal to hand schools another $4.9 billion?

This is not to say that Schwarzenegger doesn't have his own formidable challenges. He can't seem to get his bearings on the increasingly important immigration issue, having made a series of contradictory statements. And more fundamentally, he's running for re-election as a Republican governor in a Democratic state when the election itself is becoming ever more "nationalized." Bush might wind up being a bigger threat to Schwarzenegger than his eventual Democratic opponent. "Let's be real," says Los Angeles–based Republican consultant Allan Hoffenblum. "All this anti-Bush stuff really hurts Arnold. If the Democrats can take back the House in November, if there's any real Democratic landslide, Arnold will probably be buried with it." ■

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LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

Helsinki, Finland

■ The American fear of social democracy has long baffled us on the other side of the pond. According to the international PISA survey, I live in the country with the best-educated pupils in the world, every one of them a product of free public schooling. According to the OECD, I receive better healthcare—provided by the government—than the average American at half the price. According to the World Economic Forum, I live in the second most competitive economy on the planet—in a country with 80 percent of the labor force in unions. Yes, we have filthy-rich people here too, although no gated communities. EERO ILONIEMI

Lexington, Ky.

■ DEMOCRACY IS THE NEW SOCIALISM! Speak honestly about the democracy referred to in the Bill of Rights—not the decaffeinated empire rulership we are currently living under—and the moral, humanistic tenets of socialism will inherently be in the conversation. That's what's missing. Without education, healthcare and protection under the law, votes have no power. Let's talk about what would bring one person, one vote back, and watch what happens.
EARL HAZELL

Jenkintown, Pa.

■ It is sad, as Ronald Aronson says, that "the 'S' word is the kiss of death for any American political initiative." The Bush Administration's Medicare Part D plan is an excellent illustration of what happens when we take a socialistic idea and try to fit it into a capitalistic pair of shoes. Result: a vastly inefficient program and a gratuitous, meanspirited attempt to throttle consumer importation of medicines. It's also sad that neither Aronson nor trendy socialist-leaning politicians like Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales have an answer for the age-old Achilles' heel of socialism—lack of opportunity for the individual, leading to lack of productivity in the community at large. DANIEL TURNER

Ithaca, NY

■ Many thanks for the "more socialism" piece, which stated so well the vision and direction "progressives" must recapture (and that was, for me, somewhat dismaying because it vividly encapsulated how far the left has regressed). I hope it will help inspire the necessary redirection Aronson articulated. GERALD COLES

Milwaukee

■ After reading Ronald Aronson's essay I wanted to send him a dozen red roses. I haven't seen anything in years that so succinctly encapsulates how I'm feeling about politics these days. I really want to get the word back on people's radar. I'm lucky to live in a city where socialist government is within the memory of many residents (Frank Zeidler, our last socialist mayor, left office in 1960 and is still active and well-known and -regarded around here on behalf of the Socialist Party). Local historians are always quick to credit our great park system, our still-public-access lakefront and our relatively clean government to the socialists, and there seems to be a dim awareness of this among average people. So if a new socialist movement is to take root, this should be fertile terrain. JOHN EKLUND

Palmyra, NY

■ I am one of those people branded as a "hopeless liberal." In the "post-9/11 world," I have been feeling hopeless, as the forces of capitalism have quashed the voices of those who believe the good of all is an equally legitimate, if not a greater, bottom line than individualism and profit. I feel at such a loss about how to counter the prevailing rhetoric, which simply shuts down alternative views. Aronson's article truly resonated with me. CONNIE M. CASS

Baltimore

■ I am a Baltimore public school teacher and see so much poverty that it breaks my heart on a daily basis. Though I am one of a handful of white teachers, I feel that the class difference far outweighs the differences in race. My students will spend $150 on a pair of Nikes, and yet receive a free or reduced-price meal at lunchtime. I had a student invite me to her birthday party, only to find out that it had been canceled because the family's welfare check had not come in yet. We need to do something for these people; they don't want to rely on welfare checks, but they have nowhere else to go. Drugs and prostitution offer them a whole lot more than a job at McDonald's. Thank you for reintroducing the topic of socialism in today's society. BENJAMIN GITELSON

ARONSON REPLIES

Detroit

■ Thanks to Benjamin Gitelson for his painful reminder of why we need to be developing an alternative rather than more of the same priorities and values. And to Connie Cass for suggesting that political and personal hope hinges on our ability to do so. It is striking to see how many readers agree that the socialist tradition's ideas, values, analyses and experience will be central to any left alternative.

Even among *Nation* readers, however, calling for "more socialism" can serve as a Rorschach blot, eliciting whatever's on people's minds. Daniel Turner invokes the old bugbear "lack of opportunity" against "trendy socialist-leaning politicians" like Morales and Chávez. Having recently visited Venezuela, I'd recommend a trip to anyone who wants to regain political hope. I saw an impressive kindling of public energy, especially among the poor and a wide band of activists and professionals, aimed at improving life for the vast majority—attacking poverty, spreading literacy, creating healthcare facilities and building schools. To answer my anti-socialist critics, I simply can't see how using socialist ideas, experience and models to demand more equality, democracy and freedom from the market—whether in Venezuela or Finland—must translate into an "authoritarian creed" leading to "tyranny" (Michael Seaman) and causing "gulags" (Roger Kenney). Rather, Eero Iloniemi's list of Finland's achievements, in a land clearly more democratic than ours, suggests some worthy goals for America. I have developed some of these ideas in a piece on "the soul of socialism" in the next issue of *New Politics*.

Should I have included Cuba? To answer Eli Stephens, my silence was no oversight, since for all its tenacity and real accomplishments, this one-party state's great shortcoming is not "too much socialism" but too little democracy. My point is that any future US progressive movement will be infused with socialism and democracy or it will not be. And this means talking about both liberal and structural reforms. Unwilling to think these together, Michael James chides me for not calling for revolution or a general strike. But his either/or radicalism finds in my article just what he puts into it.

When I say "more socialism" I mean that the United States already has a considerable public infrastructure (roads, schools, libraries, water supply, the Post Office) as well as democratic public provisioning (Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, public hospitals, the Veterans Administration). When the right attacks any of this as "socialist," we should stop denying it and, as Barry Logan puts it, acknowledge "the elephant in the living room." It's not that "socialism hasn't even been born yet." We should embrace the name "socialism" for all these daily-life realities and dozens of other collective democratic acquisitions, including the regulations and social welfare expenditures desired by anti-socialists Seaman and Turner. We should respond by saying: "Yes, *all* this is socialist, and we need *more* socialism." And then go on to talk about a single-payer health system, and then equal educational and career opportunities, and then the right to unions, and then a global New Deal, and then stakeholder control of the economy, and then creating social investment funds, and then…

Which points up why it may not fit, as Earl Hazell asserts, to call democracy "the new socialism." On the contrary, I would argue that one of the ways to make America more democratic is through the kinds of reforms and structural changes we call "socialist." America needs more socialism. RONALD ARONSON

CORRECTIONS

■ In "For a Sane Energy Policy" (May 29) the alternative fuel E85, as its name implies, *is 85 percent ethanol (15 percent gasoline).*

Due to a fact-checking error, in Fatin Abbas's "Dining With Devils" (May 29), it was stated that Wole Soyinka declared himself and Henry Louis Gates Jr. to be "black Africans with 'no hang-ups.'" Soyinka was describing himself but not Gates, who is American.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Dead Souls

CARMEN BOULLOSA

Juan Rulfo's grandfather was a wealthy provincial rancher, his hacienda so lavish the locals thought he'd made a pact with the devil. During the years of the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero War, the family was forced to flee the countryside. They ultimately landed in Guadalajara, but there were no safe havens in those turbulent times. Rulfo's father was killed when he was 7; his mother died when he was 10; and the child was deposited for some time in an orphanage. In 1932, at the age of 15, he entered the seminary, but he quit after two years, having failed Latin—a career-breaker for an aspiring cleric. In 1935 an influential uncle arranged a job for him in Mexico City as a government bureaucrat, but Rulfo, homesick, wangled a transfer back to Guadalajara six years later. There he flourished, forming close friendships with writer Juan José Arreola and scholar-critic Antonio Alatorre and publishing his first short stories in the literary journal they edited.

It was not long, however, before the magnetism of postwar Mexico City and its cornucopia of bookshops, cafes, salons and publishers drew his friends, and Rulfo himself, back to the metropolis. The capital was in the midst of a cultural renaissance, enriched by the influx of immigrants from Mexico's provinces and stimulated by the wave of refugees from the Spanish Civil War. Intellectuals, writers, artists, academics and passionate leftists crowded the streets, and Rulfo found friends in the city's wider literary world, including the poet Octavio Paz. Aided by two fellowships from the Centro Mexicano de Escritores, he collected his short stories in a slim volume, *El llano en llamas* (The Burning Plain), in 1953. The next year, he completed the manuscript of *Pedro Páramo*.

One of the greatest novels in the Spanish language, and perhaps the greatest Mexican novel, *Pedro Páramo* initially attracted a lukewarm reception. But the book's reputation grew and spread through the 1960s and '70s, crossing national boundaries. Although he never published another novel or short story, Rulfo won prize after prize, including those most prestigious in the Spanish-speaking literary world. By 1986, when he died, an immense and adulatory literature had sprung up about his masterpiece. And the chorus of praise continues to swell—of the eighty-four books in the Library of Congress's catalogue on Rulfo, forty-six have come out since 1987.

The novel tells the story of its title character, a man who, during the era of revolution and religious warfare, was a greedy land baron who ruthlessly expanded his hacienda holdings and a despotic *cacique* (political boss) who viciously exploited the adjacent town of Comala. The protagonist occupies an esteemed place in Spanish-language literature, second only to Don Quixote, with whom he bears comparison. Both are similarly disengaged from the gearshift of reality, one because of his hyper-whimsical (arguably demented) nature, the other because he's no longer part of reality—he's a ghost. Neither is naturalistic, yet neither is utterly fantastical. Quixote is a visionary who goes through life seeing what is not there; Pedro Páramo is profoundly practical.

The hero of Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel Pedro Páramo *is second only to Don Quixote in the canon of Spanish-language literature.*

Quixote went mad, Miguel de Cervantes tells us, from reading too many bad novels. Yet Juan Rulfo holds no one accountable for the evil in Pedro Páramo's soul.

Rulfo's novel opens with a young man—we suppose he's young, though the author doesn't tell us his age—traveling to Comala, an imaginary town that resembles many of those in Jalisco, the state where Rulfo was born. He intends to carry out his mother's deathbed exhortation to visit his father,

Carmen Boullosa (www.carmenboullosa.net), a Mexican novelist and poet, is Distinguished Lecturer at City College in New York. Her most recent novel available in English is Cleopatra Dismounts *(Grove), and her latest book,* La Otra Mano de Lepanto, *was named the best Mexican novel of 2005 by the newspaper* Reforma.

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Pedro Páramo, and claim from him what "belongs to you." The young man's name is Juan Preciado (though he's a legitimate son, he wasn't given his father's name). On the road, Juan finds a man who says that he, too, is a son of Pedro Páramo. The man informs Juan that their father is dead; he shows Juan the way to a woman's house where he can stay.

Juan follows the man's instructions and the woman receives him, telling him that she's been expecting him; his dead mother, he learns, has informed her of his impending arrival. He also learns that the man who guided him to Comala has been dead for years. Later on, Juan finds out that this woman is dead, too, as are all the others who inhabit Comala. Later still the reader realizes that Juan himself is among the dead souls. Ghosts they may be, but they nevertheless speak, feel, remember, interact and do all things that living people do, as they wander through the book.

A vast cast of Comalans is presented to the reader in a parade of short stories and snapshots, Rulfo's fortes (he was a brilliant photographer as well). Each person's tale is temporally fragmented, jumps back and forth in time, fades in and out of view, but taken together they provide a collective account of the ghostly town and its history. (As in so many modern novels, the town is itself a main protagonist.) The only story whose fragments can be assembled in chronological order is Pedro Páramo's. We meet him as a child; learn of his adoration for Susana San Juan (and its nightmarish outcome); see him as a young man take the reins of his father's hacienda, La Media Luna, and proceed to ruthlessly enhance its fortunes through guile, robbery and murder; watch him survive the Revolution by manipulating rebel campesinos; and follow the land baron's fortunes and misfortunes on to his death.

But even this Ariadne's thread doesn't turn *Pedro Páramo* into a straightforward narrative of a *cacique*'s life and times. Originally Rulfo planned to call the novel *Los murmullos* (The Murmurs)—appropriately enough, as much of the text consists of whispered bits of gossip, rumors and confessions. Rulfo's whispers are masterpieces. They're aural brush strokes, depicting the times with deft economy. A few scant sentences suffice to sum up classes and customs, characters and situations: He's a verbal Velázquez. But unlike Velázquez, Rulfo never shows us the finished canvas. We get a part, and again a part, and again a part; the reader must complete the picture.

Like murmurs, the novel has an astonishing acoustic quality; its dialogues and interior monologues feel improvised, as if the author let the characters speak on their own, like actors in a Cassavetes movie. The text's popular expressions, colloquialisms, idioms, sayings and proverbs give it an authentic lightness, a regional flavor, a very Mexican and picaresque *salsita*. (Unfortunately, neither of the English translations fully captures this taste and variety.)

Pedro Páramo may be provincial, but it is also profound, at once rural and cosmopolitan. Free of pretentious "literary" verbiage, it draws on its era's Modernist currents, including the Surrealism of Octavio Paz and his group, while at the same time absorbing the approach of the European and Mexican folktale tellers Rulfo admired. (A voracious reader, he was especially fond of Knut Hamsun, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Selma Lagerlöf and Halldór Laxness, not to mention Americans like Melville, Twain, Hawthorne, Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell; he also may have been influenced by his work translating African-American spirituals.) Despite its mixed parentage—half Modernist, half folkish—and for all its gaps and jumps, his novel is a jewel of narrative fluidity.

Pedro Páramo *is about the wonders of storytelling, the power of the literary word that spins so fast the reader can never catch it.*

Innumerable interpretations have been spun about *Pedro Páramo*. It has been said to represent, embody, allegorize or illuminate: the times of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, the social context of the Revolution, patriarchal rancher culture and the repression of women, the poetic qualities of rural speech, Mexico's relationship with death, the lingering influence on Mexicans of Aztec cosmology, Mexican deruralization and the ghost towns it created, Mexican culture, Mexican history, Mexican modernity, universal myths and archetypes. All of these interpretations are right, except those asserting that they alone are right. For me, the novel is about the Novel: the wonders of storytelling, the power of the literary word that spins so fast it never lets the reader catch it.

Antonio Alatorre has suggested that his friend Rulfo "always had the habit of lying. I don't know why he liked that, throwing everyone off track." Arreola is, to be sure, an imaginative sort himself; he says of Rulfo that "sometimes, when I was carrying on a conversation with him, I had the impression that we were both lying, but that we both agreed to do so."

Indeed, many stories about Rulfo's life are in dispute. He changed the year and place of his birth; soft-pedaled his stay in the orphanage; said he never attended the seminary; denied ever having read Faulkner (annoyed by the claim, in the first thesis written about his book, that Faulkner had influenced him). And then there was the case of his grandfather's thumbs. The author liked to tell friends and interviewers that his grandfather had been among those tortured by Pedro Zamora, a *bandolero*—more like a pseudo-revolutionary—who terrorized Jalisco, hanging the rich by their thumbs until they confessed where they'd hidden their money. Rulfo claimed that in this manner Zamora had relieved his grandfather of 50,000 pesos and two thumbs. But when the historian Federico Munguía Cárdenas asked Juan's older brother, Severiano, about the incident, he replied that Juan's tale of the tortured grandfather was "puro cuento" (mere lies).

The accounts of the birth of *Pedro Páramo* also vary. According to one version, Rulfo had typed out a pile of pages on his Remington Rand but then found himself unable to arrange the fragments into a sequential manuscript—to assemble the shards into a pot—and he asked Arreola to help him put the material in "order" (though order is not the word that springs to mind in characterizing the work). Arreola has written that Rulfo was so discouraged he had actually torn up some pages and tossed them in the garbage. But he reports, also, that the order proved easy to find, especially as Rulfo had been in no doubt about which material would constitute the ending. And while Antonio Alatorre, Rulfo's other close friend from those days, confirms Arreola's version, there are scholars and others who say it isn't true. More to the point, Rulfo himself never acknowledged Arreola's help.

The particulars of the author's myriad misrepresentations—whether or not, as an obscure bureaucrat in the 1940s, he took charge of crew members captured from Italian and German oil tankers, when the enemy ships were in fact impounded on the other side of the country—are not of great moment; they may, however, provide some insight into his literary persona. Rulfo is not the kind of writer who proceeds in a journalistic or historical way. His always elusive prose is not given to calm observation, factual rendering or realistic description. (Even

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his name, Juan Rulfo, is invented: he was born Juan Nepomuceno Pérez Vizcaíno.) Hiding stories is how he reveals them; it's his way of being forthcoming. He repeatedly crisscrosses the boundaries between memory and reality. It's not that he embraces a literature of the fantastic: His characters don't fly, it doesn't rain upside down. But his pen is less a recording tool than a magic wand.

And as to how much help he received or did not receive in the final birthing of his difficult progeny, the larger truth is that *Pedro Páramo* was the work of an astonishingly gifted writer who was himself part of an exceptional generation of writers. Rulfo, Arreola, Alatorre, Paz and their comrades were members of a nurturing (as well as cantankerous) community: They shared ideas, talk, books; they read and commented on one another's work and, in general, were mutually supportive. Above all, they shared a common experience, that of growing up, and writing, in the shadow of the Mexican Revolution, an experience that distinguished their work from that of all those who came before them.

Most of the writers and artists who had lived through the Revolution and the Cristero War as adults grappled with those conflicts directly, praising the heroism, counting the tragic costs, depicting the force of the violence. And most—whether artists like muralist Diego Rivera, born in 1886, or writers like Mariano Azuela, born in 1873, whose *Los de abajo* (The Underdogs) of 1915 was one of the great novels of the Revolution—confronted the history in a realistic mode. But for Rulfo, Paz and Arreola, the Revolution had been the hand that rocked their cradle; its impact on them was completely different, as was their fictional response to it. That the world of their childhood had been one in which the border keeping death at bay was seriously smudged becomes obvious when one reads some of Paz's essays and Arreola's writings. The Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska recalls Arreola telling her two stories: "One is from Argentina. I dedicated it to Borges while I was there with him. It went like this: 'The last time that we met, Jorge Luis Borges and I were dead. To distract ourselves, Borges started talking about eternity.' Imagine the joke. And the last story went like this: 'We'll see each other in hell,' she said before pulling the trigger. 'And here I am still waiting.' Do you get it? They're horror stories." So, in its own way, is *Pedro Páramo*.

I was born the year Rulfo handed in his masterpiece, and like most Mexicans, I read *Pedro Páramo* as a teenager. It's part of the curriculum: You can't avoid it, like it or not. Luckily for me, I liked it. I read it again in college. But I was even more thrilled by *Pedro Páramo* as I discovered the wider literary world of which Rulfo had been a part, a world that included Borges, Donoso, Cortázar, Faulkner, Malcolm Lowry. For the budding writers of my '70s generation, Juan Rulfo was a king. Better yet, he was alive, a classic author who was still accessible.

I met him when I attended the Centro Mexicano de Escritores, where he, the former fellow, was now a tutor. All young Mexican writers applied to go to the Centro, partly for the monthly stipend but mostly to connect with peers and meet the masters. It was an initiation rite. The Centro was the place, as Mexican novelist José Agustín put it, where you got your visa for entry into the literary world.

I also ran into Rulfo at El Ágora, the then-trendy bookstore. As both of us lived two blocks away from it, we each went there frequently. I began following him around as he browsed the shelves and issued constant sotto voce asides—assessing texts, recalling anecdotes, extolling authors he liked and excoriating those he found boring. He was particularly persuasive on poets, scintillating about Rilke.

Gossip had it that he was drinking, that he had done so for most of his life, that he kept a tequila bottle hidden in the water box atop the toilet, but I never saw him drunk, nor imbibe more than a whiskey or two at receptions (though *Pedro Páramo* could perhaps be profitably explored—yet another interpretation—as a novel about the alcoholic experience; certainly it recounts the worst night of sweaty intoxication imaginable and also describes the mother of all hangovers).

What I mainly remember about Rulfo was that he spoke as he wrote. His verbal tempo varied wildly: Now he emitted short staccato phrases, now he held forth at languorous length. His voice was low, a bit broken. I thought he tried to give the impression of always being sad, but it seemed more a strategy than a condition: Set against a dark background, his puns and witticisms shone more brilliantly. He dressed correctly, like a man who worked in an institutional office. He wore his hair short. He was a caballero, much closer to a Quixote than to a Pedro Páramo in manners. He was always generous and kind with me; his comments on what would become my first novel were extremely reassuring and helpful. I'll always be grateful.

The frequency of our encounters eventually tapered off. My one-year fellowship ended. I moved to another neighborhood. The trendy bookstore stopped being so, and I didn't much enjoy its successor. But I've never been able to forget, each time I reread his astonishing book, its author's tone of voice, his commentaries about this or that book or writer, his peculiar mix of the provincial and the cosmopolitan. He was simple, he was enigmatic. And he had written *Pedro Páramo*. ■

Supersize Misha

J. HOBERMAN

ABSURDISTAN.
By Gary Shteyngart. Random House. 333 pp. $24.95.

So what's the Gary Shteyngart story?

Shteyngart's first novel, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*, inspired a *New York Times Magazine* profile, complete with a visit to the author's proud parents weeks in advance of the book's copious raves. These, generously excerpted in the paperback's first eight pages, compare Shteyngart—whose new novel, *Absurdistan*, captured the full cover of the *New York Times Book Review*—to Rushdie, Roth (Philip and Henry), Hemingway, Kafka and Henry Miller.

Kiss and kvell: On one hand, this 34-year-old Soviet-born writer is the avatar of a new Jewish-American literature and a poster child for immigrant success. On the other, he's an inveterate Eastern European trickster, opportunistically—or, more likely, compulsively—playing every angle even as he chases the vapors of his lost Leningrad childhood. Or so the flamboyant rogue would have us believe.

Published in 2002 and set a decade earlier, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* tells the tale of one Vladimir Girshkin, 25,

J. Hoberman is senior film critic for The Village Voice. *His books include* The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism *(Temple).*

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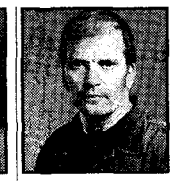

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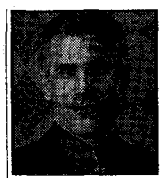

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eager-to-please slacker and hapless picaroon, "part P.T. Barnum, part V.I. Lenin"—and part parody Shteyngart. Working for the Emma Lazarus Immigrant Absorption Society, living in seedy East Village domesticity with the professional dominatrix he calls Challah, Girshkin hustles through a diminished *Bright Lights, Big City*–scape before fleeing to Prava (Shteyngart's looking-glass Prague, then in its early '90s heyday as a make-believe Paris of the '20s).

In this émigré playground, and thanks to the gangster son of a psychotic Russian immigrant Girshkin had helped obtain US citizenship, Shteyngart's self-deprecating, grandiose alter ego successfully turns the tables on his American peers. He creates a literary journal—named for the charlatan Cagliostro and part of a larger Ponzi scheme—to reinvent himself, at last, as "the small poet and businessman around whom all of Prava's expatriate world would now seem to revolve."

Girshkin's adventures are sensationally recounted in high-spirited, flavorsome prose spiced with lively sex scenes (all comic except, perhaps, for the one in which our shifty shlemiel is assaulted by an amorous Catalan gangster) and multilingual literary puns. The narrative is so manic in its Saber Dance orchestration, it might have been scored by the gypsy punks of Gogol Bordello or the Finnish surf band Laika and the Cosmonauts, whose 1997 CD *Absurdistan* anticipated the title of Shteyngart's new novel as well as its programmatic multiculturalism.

In many ways a stunning encore, *Absurdistan* presents *Debutante*'s readers with a less charming, yet more sympathetic, protagonist—and, this time, narrator. Misha Borisovich Vainberg is 30 years old and 325 pounds, "a giant florid hymie with big, squishy hands and a rather mean-looking overbite" (and, on his back, a "toxic hump"). This rap-loving fatso, dubbed Snack Daddy by his friends at Accidental College, the Ohio liberal arts playpen where he majored in multicultural studies, considers himself an American trapped in an outsized Russian body. He also embodies the freakish patrimony of Russian Jewry—son of a refusenik turned criminal oligarch, his father is the 1,238th richest man in Russia when, as the first chapter ends, he is assassinated by rival gangsters on St. Petersburg's Palace Bridge.

Upon graduating from Accidental, Misha moved to Lower Manhattan, where he rented an entire floor of an early-twentieth-century skyscraper in the shadow of the Twin Towers ("they looked to me like the promise of socialist realism fulfilled"), took an internship in a downtown art foundation, acquired a Park Avenue shrink and, one lunch hour in a Nassau Street titty bar, met the love of his life, the "mostly Dominican" homegirl Rouenna Sales. "Dang, jumbo, I think I finally made it," she exclaims when Misha brings her home to see his "hangar-sized living space."

Fin de siècle New York was a kind of crazy paradise, but when we meet Misha in June 2001, it's a paradise lost—and a confusing historical moment. Misha may be living large in grotesquely globalized Petersburg, carousing in the company of his Accidental homie, Alyosha-Bob (whom the local skinheads know as "a vile-looking Yid" and whose company, ExcessHollywood, has made him the local DVD import-export king). But he's stuck inside of Russia (where "even the sun has a distinctly anti-Semitic disposition") with the South Bronx blues again. Thanks to the crimes committed by his Beloved Papa, notably the murder of a mysterious Oklahoma businessman, the son's visa has been lifted; Snack Daddy can no longer return to New York and his beloved Rouenna.

Our hero is doubly, triply and ultimately four times exiled. Did I mention that he's also a Jew? (An alienated Jew, that is, who will at one point explain to Beloved Papa's young widow, eager to convert, that Judaism is essentially "a codified system of anxieties" designed "to keep an already nervous and maligned people in check.") Shteyngart has more than once described the humiliations to which he was subjected as a poor 12-year-old refugee in a Queens, New York, Jewish day school. Misha amplifies this suffering in a manner proportional to his girth.

En route to Accidental College and thanks to Beloved Papa's contrivance, the 18-year-old Misha was waylaid in Brooklyn, where he was circumcised by Hasidim drinking from a bathtub full of vodka and onions, who gave him the Hebrew name Moshe and evidently botched the graphically described job. ("The infection set in that night.") But if Misha's scarred and much-spoken-of *khui* resembles an "abused iguana," this does not preclude a reasonably full sex life, abetted by his amiable disposition and $35 million net worth, and including relations with his erstwhile stepmother.

A gentleman of leisure lounging around in a "leviathan Puma tracksuit," Misha imagines the reader might compare him to

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that obese and indolent landowner who is the eponymous antihero of Goncharov's *Oblomov*. As an alternative, he proposes another Russian literary archetype—and near homonym—in the person of Dostoyevsky's holy innocent, Myshkin.

Absurdistan is filled with such literary observations—Misha must have learned something by Accidental. Indeed, we learn that with his support, Rouenna has forsaken the fleshpots of Nassau Street for Hunter College, where she enrolled in a creative writing class and in her Snack Daddy's absence fell under the spell of instructor Jerry Shteynfarb, the fake refu-Jew author of *The Russian Arriviste's Hand Job* and Misha's classmate at Accidental—where their scurvy sidekick, Vladimir Girshkin, also studied.

Absurdistan encompasses *Debutante* and follows the earlier novel's structure by eventually relocating itself to a new old place—Eastern Europe, after the fall—and in this case, the even more eastern former Soviet republic of Absurdsvanï, Land of Oil and Grapes, hopeful Norway of the Caspian. This fanciful combination of the former Soviet republic of Georgia, where Shteyngart has gone on occasion to chill, and neighboring Azerbaijan is poised for destruction, divided between the Sevo and the Svanï, rival yet virtually indistinguishable ethnicities. (In the ultimate narcissism of small differences, their schism is predicated on the opposite diagonals they use to traverse their crosses.)

Prince Misha hopes to purchase Belgian citizenship as a means of returning to New York, but like his classmate Girshkin in Prava, he finds himself instead—or perhaps finds his inner Myshkin, or at least finds a new girlfriend in the robust, golden form of Nana Nanabragovna, beloved daughter of a local Sevo fixer and unhappily displaced NYU student who wears her jeans "lower than a Lower East Side *mami*."

The transition from phantasmagoric, decomposing Petersburg and fondly remembered New York to Absurdsvanï is a bit rocky. The reader suffers through several slapdash chapters before Shteyngart is able to re-establish his narrative in an unstable world of Gorbigrad *favelas*, American mega-corporations (the magic password is "Golly Burton") and, forty stories above the civil war, the multinational safe house of the local Hyatt. Around the time Misha hooks up with Nana, the US Army arrives in Svanï City and Absurdsvanï reinvents itself as the Sevo Republic, "a small but attractive nation-state on the shores of the beautiful Caspian Sea."

Absurdistan's final third lacks the finely observed visual specificity of earlier sections, and in it, Shteyngart's ear for indigenous cliché is not quite as sharp as it has been. (The formulaic "my mother will be your mother," with which both Sevo and Svanï initiate each duplicitous interaction, is considerably cruder than Snack Daddy's gangsta raps or Rouenna's patois.) Still, *Absurdistan* is written in prose so pungent that one can pick any page and find a superbly dense descriptive sentence. Misha and Nana flee Svanï City in an old Soviet locomotive newly globalized with a silk-screened American Express logo:

> The smell of fresh excrement penetrated the bulletproof walls of our wagon, and we could hear members of the AmEx Rapid Reaction Force stomping about on the roof, threatening the dying men outside with the laser scopes of their rifles or else picking off the rare Daewoo steam iron in exchange for packets of contraband saltines and warm cans of Fresca.

In opposition to the warm Fresca of globalization, Shteyngart proposes a heroically displaced twenty-first-century hybrid crew: Alyosha-Bob, Nana from the Block, a disguised California Armenian who manages the Sevo City Hyatt and supersized Misha-Moshe-Myshkin-Snack Daddy himself.

The nineteenth-century Russian critic N.A. Dobrolyubov decried Oblomovism as a Russian disease in which inertia, self-absorption and chronic indecision were raised to the level of complete social paralysis. Repeated references to *Oblomov* may beckon the unwary to read Misha as a superfluous man, but this supersized *shpritz* artist is anything but apathetic: "I'm always ready to do something important!" Assuming Misha's (nonexistent) connection to Israel, the new Sevo regime appoints him Commissar of Multicultural Affairs. (During his brief tenure, he proposes an Institute for Caspian Holocaust Studies.)

Like his half-assimilated creator, Misha is a philosopher of ethnic difference who advocates the mix-and-match. ("Due to the overabundance of presentable non-Jewish partners in a country as tantalizingly diverse and half naked as America, *it is becoming difficult if not impossible to convince young Jews to engage in reproductive sex with each other*," he writes in a memo.) Such rampant vaudeville might remind you of Spike Lee. When Misha points out that there is no Russian word for "multiculturalist," he puts his squishy finger on the crux

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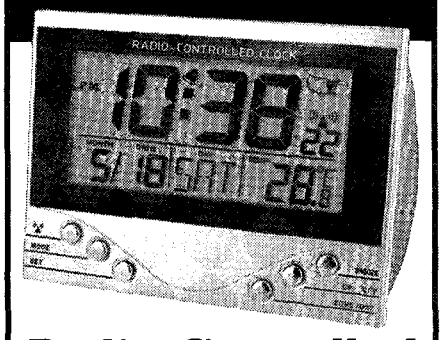

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of Shteyngart's most profound utopian impulse—the notion of a promised land where everyone, and hence no one, is an immigrant.

What is the Shteyngart story? *Absurdistan* immediately announces itself as a book about love, as indeed it is. The novel amply demonstrates a love of language, a love of women and an unattainable longing for something else. Trapped between two worlds, Misha—or, rather, Shteyngart—attempts a hopeless reconciliation. He muses on mutual exclusion, "the logical impossibility of a place like Russia existing alongside the civilized world, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, sharing the same atmosphere with, say, Vladivostok," and then attempts to effect it.

A lost love regained, an impossible reconciliation. Are these not the very themes of Nabokov's *Ada*—the ultimate émigré novel, in which childhood paradise is regained on the imaginary planet of Antiterra, where all true Russians are happy inhabitants of the United States? And is it on some Anti-Antiterra that the poseur Jerry Shteynfarb imagines himself, so Alyosha-Bob tells Misha, to be the Jewish Nabokov? (Hearing this, two Excess-Hollywood employees snort at the idea that such a creature could exist.) It's at Accidental, at any rate, that Alyosha-Bob, in the course of an acid trip with Shteynfarb and Girshkin, shreds his copy of *Ada* by feeding it to an electric fan.

Last heard from, our narrator has found refuge among the prehistoric Mountain Jews of former Soviet Absurdsvanï, exiled again but still imagining his return: "Oh, my sweet endless Rouenna. Have faith in me. On these cruel, fragrant streets, we shall finish the difficult lives we were given." What alternate universe enables this denouement? Only this one. *Absurdistan*, where time stands still and "the calendar will never pass the second week of September 2001," is the dream-bright realm of literature. ■

In Theory

JOHN GRAY

FRONTIERS OF JUSTICE: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership.
By Martha C. Nussbaum. Belknap. 487 pp. $35.

It is difficult to think of a time when liberal political thought has been as remote from political practice as it is today. There are many reasons for this situation, including the near-complete rout of liberal forces by the right. But a part of the reason lies in the development of liberal thought itself. Liberal thinkers, in the universities where they have retreated, appear to believe their main task is to specify the basic liberties of individuals and the principles of distribution for other social goods, in the conviction that once these have been identified they can be embodied in law and interpreted by courts. In this now conventional view the principles of justice can be derived from an underlying moral consensus that is embodied in modern democratic societies, and since these will be principles that all reasonable people can accept, there will be no possibility of radical political conflict. No doubt there will still be some need for political activity, but not in order to protect liberal values. Liberal values will not be at risk, since they will be enshrined in law.

The currently dominant version of liberal theory is a species of legalism in which politics takes second place to the judicial interpretation of rights. If this view of liberalism is now commonplace it is largely due to the impact of John Rawls's theory of justice. Rawls revived a version of social contract theory that has shaped the way political philosophy is practiced in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Britain and other European countries. It is a feature of contract theories that they look to agreement on principles of justice to avoid conflict over religious beliefs and moral ideals. There have been many such theories—Locke's account of what justice demands is quite different from that of Hobbes, and Rousseau's is different from both—but that has not diminished the appeal of the idea that government can be seen as embodying some sort of contract. The vision expressed in contract theory is of a society in which the murky compromises of politics are replaced by the rule of law, and people with widely different beliefs and values can live together under a regime of justice that all can accept.

It is a seductive vision, but there has always been something unreal in the view that law can achieve such a feat. People differ as much in their conceptions of justice as they do in their religious beliefs and moral values, and the idea of an overlapping moral consensus, which Rawls's theory invokes, scarcely reflects the condition of contemporary democratic societies. It is true that the language of justice and rights is pervasive, but it conceals vast divergences in moral outlook and worldview. What do gay activists and homophobic fundamentalists, liberal feminists and right-to-life fanatics, Green defenders of the natural environment and those who see the planet as a resource to be used by humans have in common? They may have some shared beliefs or values, but these are hardly sufficient to generate agreement on which human liberties are most important or on how other social goods are to be distributed. The fact is that contemporary democratic societies lack any deep consensus on values, hence the peculiarly fractious quality of contemporary politics in the "liberal" West.

That Rawls's theory has little to say on many of the issues that are currently most politically contested has not prevented his heirs from trying to extend his work to precisely these questions. Martha Nussbaum's most recent book, *Frontiers of Justice*, is the latest such effort. She aims to widen the reach of Rawlsian theory by addressing questions it has thus far largely neglected, such as the role of distributive justice in international relations, the claims of disabled people and the moral status of nonhuman animals. Nussbaum's resourceful and imaginative exploration of Rawls's work displays a command of the longer tradition of political philosophy that matches and even surpasses that of Rawls, along with a notably richer sensitivity to the history and variety of constitutional arrangements. The result is a notable contribution to philosophical inquiry that merits the most careful study by all who try to think seriously about public policy.

Still, a puzzle remains as to why Nussbaum has chosen to view the issues with which she is concerned through the lens of Rawlsian theory, when she could—per-

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haps more profitably—have examined them in the light of her own views. As she is fully aware, applying Rawls's theory to these areas is no easy matter. His vision of a scenario in which principles of justice are adopted is an idealized version of rational choice by competent human adults. Since the theory makes no reference to disabled persons, children or nonhuman animals, it is hardly surprising that the principles that emerge from it give no clear guidance as to how they are to be treated. Again, Rawls's theory was constructed to apply within modern states. It was never meant to be a charter for global redistribution. In later work he tried to develop some account of morality in international relations, but he was clear that his conception of justice reflected a moral consensus that exists (so he believed) within nation-states and could be implemented only by nation-states. When Rawls failed to apply his theory to the issues Nussbaum raises, it was not an oversight. It was because the structure of the theory he constructed precluded it from being applied in these ways.

Thus, in order to extend Rawls's account of justice to such issues, Nussbaum has to make major alterations in the theory. One can't help but wonder why she takes the trouble to make these elaborate adjustments, especially as she concedes that many of Rawls's conclusions can be reached through other types of argumentation. Why does she force her deliberations into the Procrustean mold of Rawls's contract theory? The reason may be the canonical prestige of Rawls's theory. Nussbaum's attitude toward Rawls's work is one of piety, and this leads her to accept aspects of his theory that critical reflection might have led her to question. She writes of Rawls's theory that its

> principles themselves, or something very like them, are good principles—not only for those cases to which Rawls applies them, but for other cases concerning which he advances no principles at all. Moreover, the ideas of fairness and reciprocity that these principles embody and render concrete are themselves deeply attractive ethical ideas.... It would be good to extend those principles and those ideas to our unsolved problems of justice.

As these remarks show, Nussbaum does not question the idea that the problem areas she identifies for Rawls's theory concern issues of justice. But why should this be assumed? Nussbaum mentions the alternative view presented in Utilitarianism in which it is the promotion of well-being and the avoidance of suffering rather than any idea of justice that is fundamental—only to reject it as being obviously inferior to Rawls's Kantian approach. It is true that Utilitarianism has many problems, some of them insoluble. At the same time it does seem to me to have one large advantage over Rawls's approach, which is that it is not a reiteration of received opinion.

Rawls's method in moral theory is a process of "reflective equilibrium" that involves clarifying our moral intuitions and shaping them into a coherent whole. In its nature this method can do no more than turn the moral beliefs expressed in current opinion into something like a system. In contrast Utilitarianism appeals to features of the world that stand outside our moral beliefs, and that could compel us to revise them. In this respect Utilitarianism seems better equipped to deal with a number of difficult moral issues, particularly those arising in our relations with other animal species. Once again, Nussbaum is fully aware of this difficulty:

> The whole idea of a justification that looks for a reflective equilibrium and uses the idea of overlapping consensus is an anthropocentric idea. The holism in ethics that Rawls and I share may be contested at this point by a reasonable Benthamite, who will insist that what justifies changes in our treatment of animals is not the coherence of a family of human theories and judgements, even bolstered by reasonable agreement and overlapping consensus; it is, instead, a fact utterly external to the human point of view, namely animal suffering.

I am not a disciple of Jeremy Bentham, but it was Bentham who observed that it is not whether animals can think that matters but that they can suffer. Those who oppose animal experimentation—as I do myself—do so not because it cannot be fitted comfortably into a theoretical reconstruction of prevailing moral attitudes but because they believe these attitudes to be defective. If Bentham had aimed only to systematize the moral beliefs of his day he would not have been one of the first Western thinkers to give animal suffering proper attention. With all its difficulties Utilitarianism allows a critical distance from received opinion that Rawls cannot provide.

The trouble with Rawls's theory is that it aims to stay on the surface of things and very largely succeeds. Instead of digging into the metaphysical and epistemological questions that have preoccupied philosophers in the past, Rawls seeks to avoid them. Its goal is not truth but agree-

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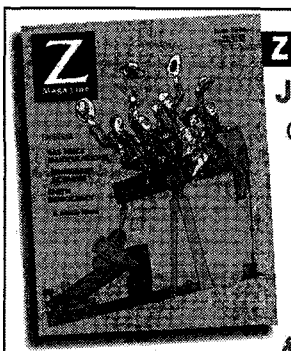
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ment, which he believes can be achieved through a systematic reconstruction of current moral beliefs. But which moral beliefs are allowed into consideration, and how is this decided? As a method in moral theory, reflective equilibrium has the fatal flaw of intuitionism. It has no way of addressing those who stand outside the charmed circle of people whose intuitions are viewed as relevant.

As a way of doing political theory it is prone to a corresponding failure of realism. The data that are used to construct the theory of justice are the moral intuitions of the liberal academy, but these are no longer widely shared in the larger society (if they ever were) and have little leverage on political practice. Anti-liberal forces such as ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism have come to shape much of contemporary political life. Yet, like Rawls, Nussbaum barely mentions this fact. She notes that just institutions of the kind envisioned in Rawls's theory "do not come into being unless people want them, and they can cease to be if people stop wanting them, something that the demise of New Deal-style social democracy in the United States has shown all too clearly." She does not ask how the rights and liberties she believes ought to be enshrined in law can survive when the larger political culture is indifferent or hostile to the values they express.

In a curious convergence liberal theory has given up on politics at a time when liberal values have become marginal in practice. Instead of trying to understand the forces that shape political life—as John Stuart Mill did in his writings on socialism and nationality, for example—contemporary liberal thinkers have constructed a legalistic edifice from which politics has been excluded. Nussbaum is aware that this rickety structure shuts out a great deal that is important, and in *Frontiers of Justice* she tries to let in some light. If she achieves less than she might it is because the giant shadow of Rawls stands in her way. ■

FILMS

Wind From the Mideast

STUART KLAWANS

THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS: DISCOVERING SYRIAN CINEMA

What is Arab cinema? The distinguished documentarian Omar Amiralay, speaking in a French as suave as his slicked-back hair, rolled the question around his mouth for a moment. He was at New York's Walter Reade Theater for a panel discussion on the series "The Road to Damascus: Discovering Syrian Cinema," organized by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and ArteEast; and yet, despite his being a guest of honor there, someone wanted to know if this spare, erect, professorial figure might willingly lump together his own work with the films of other directors, on the basis of a common language and geography.

What is Arab cinema? "A term that I don't really mind," Amiralay ventured dryly. But when you think of the films of Ingmar Bergman, he continued, do you immediately resolve them into something called Scandinavian cinema? Let individual filmmakers develop their art, he said, and then Arab cinema will come into being, defined by what its authors have done.

For many film academics in Europe and America, this response would be mildly heretical, the *auteur* having supposedly died years ago. But within the startlingly vibrant and utterly distinctive realm of Syrian cinema—a category that Amiralay does not resist, despite his French training and early Soviet affinities—authorship remains not only conceivable but necessary.

In Syria, all scripts must be approved in advance by the state censorship board—a process that can take years, during which maddening rumors may alternate with ringing silence. If approved, the script must then be produced by the National Film Organization, which manages at best only four or five features a year, since nothing resembling a production apparatus exists in Syria. Because exhibition, too, is under state control, any film that somehow gets through this grind may then be banned from the theaters, either officially or tacitly, if it arouses suspicion of being politi-

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cally provocative. The "paradox" of Syrian cinema (to use Amiralay's word) is that so many of these state-financed pictures really are provocations—beautiful, strange, uncanny provocations. According to Rasha Salti of ArteEast, 80 percent of Syrian films are political in nature, and are "the only cultural expression that raises questions or is in opposition to the regime." At the same time, these films are works of flaming aestheticism, pushed through the system by people who have no choice except to act as individuals, and who find their principal audience not in Damascus but in Cannes.

In short, we are looking at the work of a classic avant-garde: a congeries of artists living in internal exile, thrown back on their own resources and determined to stay true to their personal visions. To quote another guest of honor on the Lincoln Center panel, the fiction filmmaker Oussama Mohammad, Syrian film is "a cinema free of its audience." As his reply to the question of Arab cinema, Mohammad observed that Egyptian directors have a public and therefore suffer the misfortune of pleasing other people. They need to throw in a little romance, a little violence, a little song and dance. In Syria, by contrast, "you make your own film." During the fifteen years that passed after his first feature was produced and banned, Mohammad said, he repeatedly told the censorship committee that he would make exactly the film he was proposing and no other, and nobody was going to make him change a single frame.

The fierceness of this boast was mollified somewhat by the absurdity of Mohammad's situation—he is an employee of the same National Film Organization that wouldn't produce his second feature—and also by his appearance. He seemed like an aging Arlo Guthrie to Amiralay's professor: round, frizzy-haired, sprawling, quick to smile and quick to answer questions in Arabic, sometimes interspersed with a fluent and relaxed English. But, for all that, Mohammad's refusal to compromise could not be questioned, if you had spent time at "The Road to Damascus" and seen his films.

His 1988 debut feature *Stars in Broad Daylight* begins in a rural village, where a double wedding is staged and then wildly, operatically disrupted, under the mismanagement of the family's preening senior member. After a few forays into Damascus, the picture ends with another wedding, this one sternly enforced by the same family member and not nearly so funny. The film has an unruly energy reminiscent of Emir Kusturica's movies, though without the elbow jabs that Kusturica sometimes throws, to remind you of what a good time you're supposed to be having. Mostly Oussama Mohammad just shows you a good time, since *Stars in Broad Daylight* is absurdly, inventively funny, when it's not being harshly satiric or heartbreaking. To a foreign viewer, though, the film's jumpiness can be a little puzzling, and the reason for its ban incomprehensible. What caused the trouble?

"There are 1,001 stories," Mohammad began, when a naïve journalist—me—questioned him at the panel discussion. The country's informants and pseudo-journalists, he said, started a whispering campaign against the film and its theme of the pathology of power, as seen within one family.

Also, this was the first feature film shot in the Alawite region, using the dialect spoken by the President.

And then, the lead actor (writer-director Abdellatif Abdul-Hamid) was made up to look like Assad.

With that, the naïve inquirer suddenly understood some of those inexplicably jumpy moments—such as the family leader's abrupt appearance at a telephone switchboard, where he cheerfully taps the calls, or his sneak attack on the sweet, harmless man who's been dating his sister. For this crime, the suitor is beaten, while the surrogate Assad shouts, "We are the source of morality!"

These little allegories may need some deciphering, especially for foreigners; but they are transparent compared with the denser, more symbolic imagery of Mohammad's second feature, *Sacrifices* (2003). Perhaps under the pressure of those fifteen years of imposed silence, Mohammad changed his style remarkably for this film, going in one leap from Kusturica to Tarkovsky. The locale, again, is a rural settlement; the characters once more are members of an extended family. But starting from the opening shot—a screen-filling close-up of a man's head, entirely slathered in green mud—*Sacrifices* is not a story but an unsettling, fragmentary mood piece, evoking the yearnings, angers and frustrations of people who are stuck in limbo. A naked child is lowered head first through a hole in the ceiling, into a shaft of light. A door swings open and the Angel of Death enters, in the form of a pigeon. A girl presses her head against the bare shoulder of the boy who loves her, and the freckles migrate from her face onto his skin. A teacher, chanting the Koran at the foot of a tree, looks up to find his pupils arrayed on the branches, like giggling fruit. Even a Syrian, I suspect, would find much of this imagery difficult

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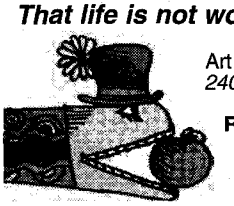

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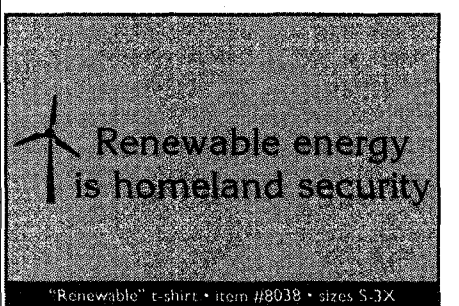

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to decode. And perhaps decoding isn't necessary. These pictures, one by one and in timed succession, may be cryptic, but they also feel full and complete.

There is nothing enigmatic, by contrast, about Omar Amiralay's documentaries. They're as outspoken as can be—and yet they, too, convey their argument through unforgettably strong images. Among the most forceful of his films is *A Flood in Baath Country* (2003), which has the added benefit of encapsulating Amiralay's career for you. In 1970, fresh out of film school and fired with enthusiasm for the Baath regime, he made a short titled *Film-Essay on the Euphrates Dam*. At the beginning of *A Flood in Baath Country*, you see footage from this early work: brief views of dam construction, shot in expert imitation of Amiralay's beloved Dziga Vertov. Meanwhile, on the soundtrack, the present-day Amiralay speaks of his distress at having made such a film. Construction was shoddy; dams have fatally collapsed. As for the artificial Lake Assad, beneath whose waters stand inundated villages, it now seems to Amiralay to be the perfect symbol of the Baath regime, which seeks to submerge all life in Syria.

The image changes to contemporary footage. An elderly man, shown as if he'd been interviewed in a rowboat, explains that he knows the exact spot where his house can be found at the bottom of Lake Assad. Then another elderly man appears on the screen: a village chief and member of Parliament who has loyally served the regime for decades. In response to an unseen interviewer's bland questions, he sings the praises of Hafez al-Assad, the greatest of leaders, the most visionary of men, the all-knowing genius, the nation's savior. Cut back to the rowboat, bobbing on Lake Assad. When the scene changes again, you see the village chief's nephew—a local Baath Party leader and the principal of the school—discussing the role of education in Syria. Cut to children reciting lessons, which sound more or less like praise of Assad. Cut back to the rowboat bobbing on the lake.

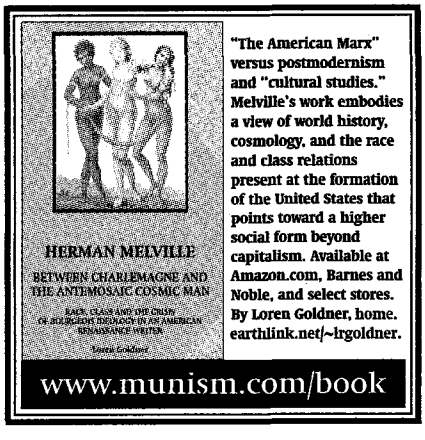
An astonishing film—and, of course, a banned one. Bootleg copies make their way to anyone in Syria who really wants to see it; but the uncomfortable fact remains that this polemic about the Baath country plays mostly to people who don't live there.

So two objections arise. The first may be summed up in the words of an Arab journalist, as quoted in a recent *New Yorker* article by Lawrence Wright: "The films get awards abroad, which is good P.R. for the regime." This is the argument you used to hear against "daring" Soviet bloc films that went unseen at home but were praised at international festivals, the complaint you still hear against the Iranian art cinema. The best answer takes the form of a question: Would it be better if the filmmakers just went along quietly?

The second, contrary objection came up at the Lincoln Center panel discussion, when a member of the audience rose to denounce Richard Peña, the Film Society's program director. Peña had worked on and off for ten years to organize "The Road to Damascus." He had also said in a recent newspaper interview that Syria's filmmakers expose the failure of Arab regimes—words that were cited, to the speaker's particular outrage, in *The Jewish Week*. Here was proof that these filmmakers are tools, used to demonize the entire Arab people.

The best answer to this objection came from Amiralay: "When intellectuals in despotic societies manage, with great difficulty, to make an act of resistance, they are surprised to hear intellectuals beyond their borders say, 'You are playing into the hands of the imperialists.' I find it absolutely shameful for this pseudo-left, pseudo-Islamist orchestra to be complicit in the crimes committed by these regimes against their own people. Anytime I hear this, I'm mad enough to spit."

Rather than complain about these tough-minded, visionary, extraordinarily principled film artists, you might want instead to give them a small gesture of support. "The Road to Damascus: Discovering Syrian Cinema" has completed its run in New York, but it will soon travel to venues including the Gene Siskel Film Center in Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and the Northwest Film Center in Portland, Oregon. A complete tour schedule is posted at www.arteeast.org. ■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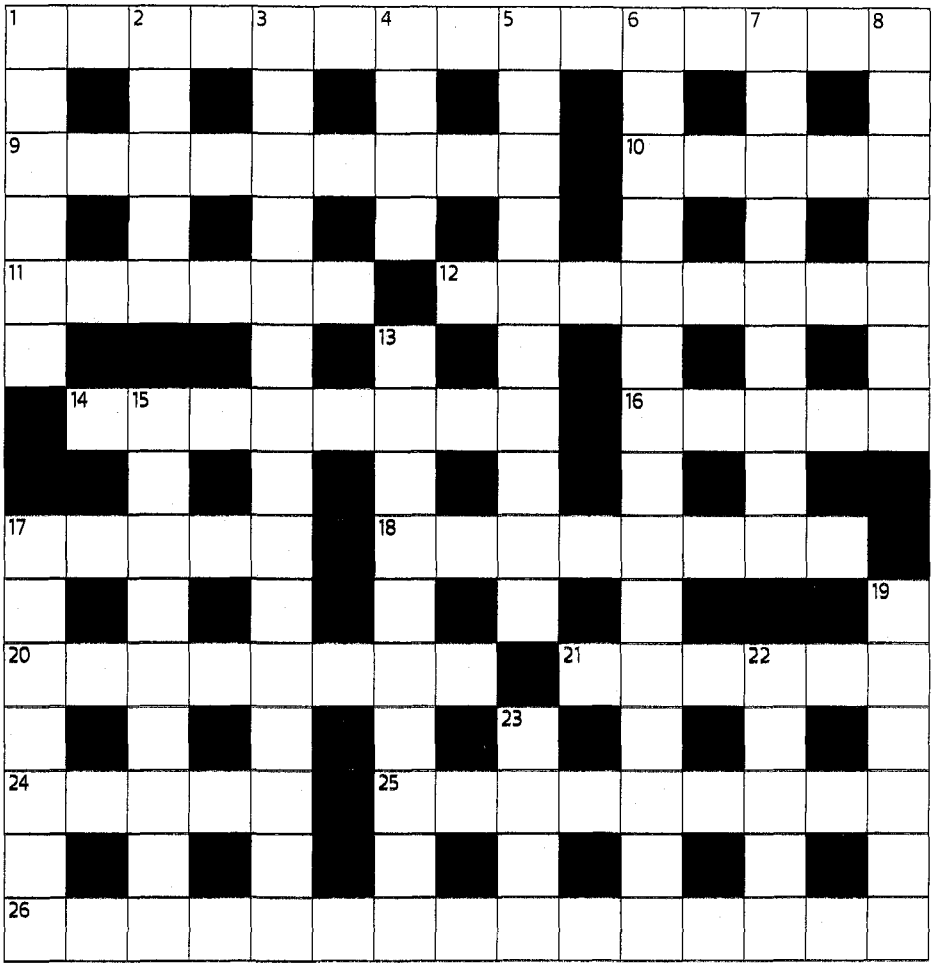
PUZZLE NO. 3037

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Not going out with something that dives under water, making a clerical type show "uppitiness." (15)

9 Shopping place, bringing back a type of wit, returning shortly in place of St. Louis—showing what fallen heroes might achieve. (9)

10 Proving good preference is in a bad state. (5)

11 It looks like 10 have supper with an element of it. (6)

12 Not the records of amateurs, and certainly not full-face ones. (8)

14 Perhaps describing a couple of gentlemen, over one section that contains such. (8)

16 If you see this bird with a hood, he might be in a famous forest. (5)

17 Nothing kicking, as they say, in a branch of the peace movement. (5)

18 Having a steering mechanism where you keep something valuable to wild deer. (8)

20 A common article with a Morse sort as part of the mathematics lesson. (8)

21 This tells you to go a bit slow with such as 19 down—and give short notice to a soldier who has nothing! (6)

24 The girl who accumulated quite a hoard, in a way. (5)

25 Rather punk way to hope for the better. (5,4)

26 Were wrong about the sort of hat showing what sounds like a good return—but one hopes they make a fair prediction. (7,8)

DOWN

1 and **13** Short-long, again and again and again and again! (6,10)

2 Begat rough rides. (5)

3 One can't quite touch things so! (6,4,5)

4 What such a bridge did to a flood would imply coyness, which is due right, in a way. (4)

5 This blooming thing goes on and on! (10)

6 A Quakerly deed? (3,2,10)

7 One hopes this puzzle is not in the sun, figuratively, and turning blue. (9)

8 Such a rating shows how many people look at the box, being measures in 9 possibly. (7)

13 See 1 down

15 His writing might be novel, but what's the point to such a distance having little weight brought up with the French? (5,4)

17 You might be too big for your britches if you do this to them. (7)

19 Movements headed by Mr. Reagan, with the grass pulled up—and give short notice to a soldier who has nothing! (6)

22 Nothing sort of goes around it, but it was a golden layer. (5)

23 A famous duelist you get to rub up, right? (4)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3036

B	A	C	K	S	E	A	T		D	R	I	V	E	R
I		L		U		E		W		I		O		E
C	R	O	P	P	E	R		A	C	C	O	U	N	T
Y		N		P		A		L		K		C		Y
C	R	E	D	O		T	A	L	K	S	S	H	O	P
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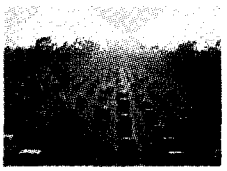
IMPORTANT NEWS FOR PRESCRIPTION EYEGLASS WEARERS

Warning: Driving with prescription glasses in sunny conditions can be a glaring danger



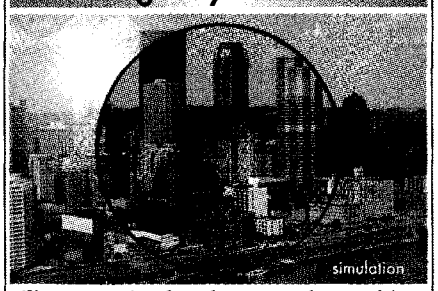
A bright sunny day can be a real headache to prescription eyeglass wearers. Until now, your choices were limited. Prescription sunglasses are very expensive and are not designed to eliminate dangerous road glare. But traditional fit-overs are big, bulky and quite unattractive. Finally there is a technologically advanced answer. NASA inspired Eagle Eyes patented optics are now available in sleek fit-over sunglasses so you can drive more safely in glaring sunlight.

Dangerous glare is at maximum levels during afternoon and morning rush hours–peak driving times. The Eagle Eyes lens technology can actually eliminate blinding glare and harmful UV rays. Many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded as they are driving directly into the perilous glare of the sun. Prescription glasses can make matters worse because small scratches in the lenses can actually increase reflected glare. Intense brightness can cause drivers to momentarily close their eyes and lose a clear view of other automobiles, which is when a nasty accident can occur. These blinding conditions can be caused by reflected light off of another vehicle, from the pavement, or from dirty scratched eyeglasses.

Clear glass is a dirty problem!

Just like your eyeglasses, your clear glass windshield can make matters worse because of small scratches and road grime that can increase reflected glare. Certain road conditions can raise the amount of UV that you are exposed to by up to 85%. Dr. Joel Hirsh says, "Too often, people purchase sunglasses based only on style and darkness. Eagle Eyes not only look great, but they're one of the safest sunglasses you can buy. Their patented Tri-Lenium-Gold™ Blocking Lens Technology blocks almost 100% of harmful blue, violet and ultraviolet light while the polarized filter cuts glare!"

Eagle Eyes® Lens



Slip on a pair of Eagle Eyes and everything instantly appears more vivid and sharp. You'll immediately notice that your eyes are more comfortable and relaxed and you'll feel no need to squint. The scientifically designed sunglasses are not just fashion accessories—they are necessary to protect your eyes from those harmful rays produced by the sun in many peak driving times.

NASA's researchers looked to nature for a solution.

At NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, scientists looked to nature for a solution by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. NASA's researchers studied how eagles can simultaneously distinguish their prey from their surroundings with utmost precision, while protecting their eyes from the daily exposure of harmful high-energy sunlight. The studies led to this revolutionary protection for human eyesight.

Patented triple filtering lens system.

With a patented triple filtering system, Eagle Eyes® will reduce the blinding glare

you may encounter while driving or enjoying outside activities. Eagle Eyes® provides 99.9% eye protection from harmful ultraviolet, and protection from blue and violet light rays. You can experience enhanced visual acuity, even at great distances in most weather conditions.

Drive with safety and style.

For years the only option was to purchase huge bulky fit-over designs to fit over your spectacles. Our Fit-Ons will fit comfortably over your current prescription glasses giving you the protection of Eagle Eyes saving you the expense of costly prescription sunglasses. Both the forward lenses as well the peripheral lenses offer the extraordinary visibility and shielding your eyes need. If you are not thrilled with the Eagle Eyes® Fit-Ons technology, just send them back for a full refund of the purchase price.

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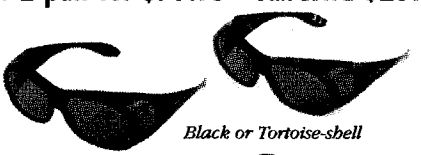

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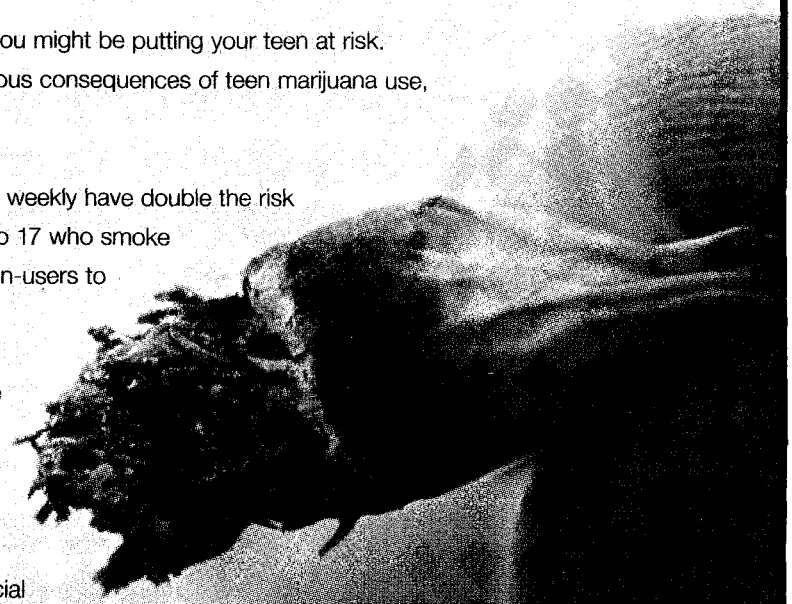
MARIJUANA AND YOUR TEEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Depression. Suicidal Thoughts. Schizophrenia.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

If you have outdated perceptions about marijuana, you might be putting your teen at risk. New research is giving us better insight into the serious consequences of teen marijuana use, especially how it impacts mental health.

Did you know that young people who use marijuana weekly have double the risk of depression later in life?[1] And that teens aged 12 to 17 who smoke marijuana weekly are three times more likely than non-users to have suicidal thoughts?[2]



And if that's not bad enough, marijuana use in some teens has been linked to increased risk for schizophrenia in later years.[3]

Today's teens are smoking a more potent drug[4] and starting use at increasingly younger ages during crucial brain development years.[5] Still think marijuana's no big deal?

Remember, you are the most important influence in your teen's life when it comes to drugs,[6] so tell your teen the facts about marijuana. Teens who learn about the risks from their parents are less likely to smoke marijuana or use other drugs than teens who don't.

Let your teens know you don't want them using marijuana. Their mental health may depend on it.

Signed,

- *American Psychiatric Association*
- *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*
- *American Society of Addiction Medicine*
- *Asian Community Mental Health Services*
- *Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse*
- *Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc.*
- *National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association*
- *National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers*
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[1]Patton, GC et al. Cannabis use and mental health in young people: cohort study. *British Medical Journal*, 325: 1195–1198, 2002. [2]Greenblatt, J. Adolescent self-reported [illegible] behaviors and their association with marijuana use, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1998. [3]Arseneault, L. et al. Cannabis use in adolescence and risk for adult psychosis: longitudinal prospective study. *British Medical Journal*, 325: 1212–1213, 2002; Veen, N et al. Cannabis use and age at onset of schizophrenia. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 161: 501–506, 2004. [4]*Marijuana Potency Monitoring Project. Report No. 83*, University of Mississippi, 2003. [5]SAMHSA. Trends in Initiation of Substance Use, 2003. [6]SAMHSA. Parental Disapproval of Youths' Substance Abuse, 2002.

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